NATION

Indira assassin's kin loses bid to keep his name secret in NZ

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BUSINESS

Rupee breaches 95-mark against USD for 1st time

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SPORTS

Sheetal named 'Para Archer of the Year'

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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In LS, Shah declares India is 'nearly free' from Naxals

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday declared that India is nearly free of Naxalism, with the Maoists' apex body and central structure "almost completely dismantled", as he sharply criticised the Congress for allegedly failing to curb the decades-long insurgency.

Replying to a Lok Sabha debate on efforts to eliminate Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), Shah alleged that Congress' Rahul Gandhi had been seen with Naxal sympathisers and had posted content "sympathetic" to Maoists. He further claimed that several frontal organisations linked to Maoists participated in the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

Targeting the Congress, Shah said former prime minister Indira Gandhi had accepted Naxal support during a 1970s election in undivided Andhra Pradesh and remained influenced by Maoist ideology. "Without support from those in power, the Red Corridor could not have been created," he said.

Reiterating his 31 March, 2026 deadline to end LWE, Shah outlined recent gains: all state committee members in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh have surrendered; in Odisha, one surrendered and three were killed; and in Telangana, all cadres have either surrendered or been eliminated.

He said 12 states were once affected, with 12 crore people living in poverty and around 20,000 deaths, including 5,000 security personnel. Questioning the Congress's record, Shah said it ruled for 60 years but failed to deliver development to tribal regions.

Referring to the killing of Naxal leader Hidma, accused of orchestrating attacks that killed 172 soldiers, Shah alleged slogans defending him were raised at India Gate and that Gandhi had shared related videos.

Amit Shah —PTI

Shah said development in Bastar had long been stalled by "red terror" but is now progressing under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He reiterated that talks would only be held with those who surrender, warning that "a bullet will be answered with a bullet". —PTI

25 phones go missing during IPL match in B'luru

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Police on Monday launched a probe after receiving 25 complaints about mobile phones going missing during an IPL match at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium here, officials said. The incident occurred on 28 March during the opening match of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026 between Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Sunrisers Hyderabad, they said. The matter came to light after a netizen flagged the issue in a video shared on social media, police added. "There is a possibility that the phones were either stolen or misplaced outside the stadium, with victims realising it only after entering the premises," a senior police officer said. —PTI

2-day slump wipes out Rs 18L cr from stock markets

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Equity investors have become poorer by Rs 18.60 lakh crore in two days in the stock market as the BSE Sensex plunged 4 per cent, due to the West Asia conflict leading to a surge in crude oil prices. Weak global trends and unabated foreign fund outflows have also rattled investors. In the last two trading sessions, the BSE Sensex lost 3,325.9 points, or 4.41 per cent. On Monday, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tumbled 1,635.67 points, or 2.22 per cent, to settle at 71,947.55. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies tumbled Rs 18,60,662.29 crore to Rs 4,12,41,172.45 crore (USD 4.36 trillion) in two days. — PTI

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AIFF Chief accused of harassment by women panel head

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

All India Football Federation (AIFF) President Kalyan Chaubey has come under scrutiny after Valanka Alemao, the head of the AIFF Women's Committee, accused him of harassment during an Executive Committee meeting in New Delhi. The allegations have put the spotlight on football governance once again. The incident is said to have taken place during the AIFF Executive Committee meeting at the Football House on 29 March, where Alemao alleged she was "heckled and harassed" by senior officials. Valanka Alemao is the current head of the AIFF Women's Committee. She is also the CEO of Churchill Brothers Football Club Goa. — AGENCIES

LeT commander Shabbir Lone arrested in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

The Special Cell of Delhi Police has arrested suspected Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) handler Shabir Ahmed Lone from the Ghazipur area and secured five days' police custody. Police described Lone, a Srinagar resident also known as Raja and Kashmiri, as a "hardcore and highly trained terrorist" with links to handlers associated with Pakistan's ISI. He allegedly led a recently busted module involved in pasting anti-national posters across Delhi and Kolkata. Officials said Lone aimed to revive terror activities by activating sleeper cells and recruiting operatives, using Bangladesh as a base. Investigations revealed he had set up a hub in Kolkata. — PTI

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I can take Iran's oil, destroy their energy infra: Trump

Asks Iran to make a deal soon or US will blow desalination, energy plants

DUBAI, 30 MARCH

US President Donald Trump said he could take "take the oil in Iran" — which would require seizing the crucial Kharg Island —and then later posted on his Truth Social that he intends to bomb the Islamic Republic's energy resources and other vital infrastructure, including desalination plants, if a peace deal was not reached "shortly".

Trump has repeatedly claimed to be making diplomatic progress — though Tehran denies negotiating directly — while ramping up his threats and sending thousands more US troops to the West Asia.

Trump claimed in his post on Monday that "great progress is being made" in diplomatic talks and that a deal is likely to be reached shortly, as Pakistan hosted a high-level summit aimed at ending the war. However, Iran has dismissed the claims.

But "if the Hormuz Strait is not immediately 'Open for Business," we will conclude our lovely "stay" in Iran by blowing up and completely obliterating all of their Electric Generating Plants, Oil Wells and Kharg Island (and possibly all desalinisation plants!), which we have purposefully not yet 'touched (sic)," Trump posted.

The de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz has sent oil and gas prices skyrocketing and nearly all of Iran's oil passes through Kharg Island.

If Trump carries out the strikes, it would likely constitute a war crime. International law only allows strikes on critical infrastructure such as energy plants if the military advantage outweighs the civilian harm, a significantly high bar, legal scholars say. Trump has blamed the previous attacks on Iran's energy facilities on Israel.

Iran has warned that if its oil and desalination facilities are targeted, it would destroy such plants in the Gulf – which could devastate the region, as the countries depend on the infrastructure for drinking water. Iran has already demonstrated its ability to do so, when its plants came under attacks previously in the nearly one-month long war.

On Monday, Tehran struck a key water and electrical plant in Kuwait, and an oil refinery in Israel came under attack in what Iran called a retaliation for strikes on its infrastructure. —Agencies

>>>More on Pgs 4, 5, 6 &7

OIL COST: $116

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-31

War sparks 60% gas price hike for fertiliser plants

The war has triggered a 60 per cent surge in natural gas prices, raising input costs for fertiliser plants and likely increasing the government's subsidy burden. Gas supply has been curtailed to 80 per cent of demand, prompting firms to procure LNG from spot markets at nearly double pre-crisis rates. The Gulf region disruption has also inflated costs of ammonia, sulphur and freight. India's Kharif 2026 fertiliser demand is pegged at 39 million tonnes, with stocks at 18 million tonnes. Domestic output has dipped too.

19 Indian ships with energy cargo stranded in Hormuz

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

As many as 19 vessels carrying LPG, crude oil and LNG meant for India remain stranded in the Strait of Hormuz amid the escalating West Asia conflict, officials said. Of these, 10 are foreign-flagged, including three LPG carriers, four crude oil tankers and three LNG vessels. The remaining are Indian-flagged ships, comprising three LPG tankers, one LNG carrier and four crude oil tankers, with one empty tanker currently being filled with LPG.

The vessels are among around 500 ships affected in the narrow strait. Eight Indian-flagged vessels have sailed out safely in recent days, including LPG carriers BW TYR and BW ELM, carrying about 94,000 tonnes of LPG. BW TYR is expected to reach Mumbai on March 31, while BW ELM is headed to New Mangalore, due on April 1.

Officials said the priority is to secure Indian-flagged vessels and crew. All Indian seafarers are safe, with no incidents reported in the past 24 hours and stability maintained over the last 72 hours.

Earlier, LPG tankers Pine Gas and Jag Vasant delivered over 92,000 tonnes between March 26 and 28, while MT Shivalik and MT Nanda Devi reached Mundra and Kandla earlier in March.

Oil tanker Jag Laadki also reached Mundra, and Jag Prakash safely crossed the strait.

Currently, 18 Indian-flagged vessels with 485 seafarers are on the west side of the strait and two on the east, with movements under close monitoring. —PTI

Eight Indians lost their lives since start of Iran war: MEA

Amid the escalating West Asia conflict, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said eight Indian nationals have died and one remains missing in various incidents. An Indian was also killed in Kuwait on Sunday, while another death was reported earlier in Riyadh. Since February 28, around 5.5 lakh passengers have returned to India. Authorities are addressing academic disruptions, including CBSE, ICSE and entrance exams. Flights remain limited, with operations continuing from the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman, while Kuwait and Bahrain airspace stay shut. India is facilitating evacuations via third countries and monitoring the safety of seafarers in the region.

POCSO accused video calls victim from Dharwad jail

DHARWAD, 30 MARCH

A case has been registered against a man lodged in jail here in a POCSO case for allegedly harassing the victim through video calls from inside the prison here.

Disclosing this a senior official here said on Monday that a case was registered on 14 March, the official said.

The accused allegedly made video calls to the minor victim from jail and subjected her to mental harassment. He also allegedly pressured her to speak in his favour in court, the official added.

He threatened her that if she did not receive his video calls, he would circulate obscene videos.

The accused person's video call screen recording, which has surfaced online, is said to be from the jail on 13 March, following which the victim's family members informed the authorities about the matter. —PTI

Census to begin on 1 April in K'taka, other states

BENGALURU, 30 APRIL

The Census 2027 will commence in Karnataka with self-enumeration from April 1, followed by a month-long house-to-house 'Houselisting and Housing Census' starting 15 April. This first phase will be conducted nationwide between 1 April and 30 September, capturing details on housing conditions, assets and household amenities.

The second phase, scheduled for February next year, will focus on population enumeration, including caste, demographic, socio-economic and cultural details of individuals. Along with Karnataka, the exercise will begin in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Goa, Sikkim, Odisha, Lakshadweep, Mizoram and parts of Delhi (NDMC and Delhi Cantonment).

Phase one of Census 2027 to have 33 QUESTIONS for citizens: Govt

Under self-enumeration, households can submit details via a dedicated portal and receive a unique ID, which must be shared with enumerators during field visits for verification and inclusion in the official database.

LIVE-IN COUPLE BE TREATED AS 'MARRIED'

The government has also released 33 FAQs to guide respondents. Notably, live-in couples who consider their relationship a stable union will be treated as married.

The first phase will include 33 questions covering housing materials, condition of the house, number of residents, married couples, and basic amenities. Enumerators will also collect details on the head of the household, including name, sex and social category, along with information on food habits, access to facilities and ownership of assets such as vehicles. —PTI

>>>More on Page 4

OFFICIALS WRITE TO SHAH

'CAPF Bill will make cadre officers 2nd class citizens'

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

A group of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) officers has petitioned Home Minister Amit Shah to reconsider the CAPF (General Administration) Bill, 2026, alleging it reduces cadre officers to "second-class citizens"

They argue the Bill creates a "glass ceiling" by reserving top posts such as Director General and Special Director General entirely for IPS officers, blocking career progression despite experience and eligibility.

Officers from batches between 2011 and 2016, including Shaurya Chakra awardee CRPF Assistant Commandant Bibhor Kumar Singh, said the provisions were "oppressive" and would demoralise personnel, affecting morale and financial security. They urged a review before passage. The Bill, introduced by Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai, seeks a unified framework for service conditions across the five CAPFs.

—ANI

Retired CAPF officers claim it undermines a May 2025 Supreme Court ruling that called for reducing IPS deputation and improving promotions for cadre officers. Veterans have demanded wider consultations, calling the Bill "discriminatory".

In the Rajya Sabha, Opposition members criticised the move as an attempt to override the court's directive. They highlighted long delays in promotions for CAPF officers compared to IPS counterparts and warned of worsening morale, rising resignations and potential impacts on internal security. —PTI

JioStar stops IPL broadcast to B'desh

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

JioStar has ended its IPL broadcast agreement with TSports over payment defaults, leaving millions in Bangladesh unlikely to watch the 2026 season on television.

The move comes amid reports that Bangladeshi authorities are reconsidering an earlier blanket ban on IPL broadcasts following diplomatic tensions with India.

TSports had sublicensed IPL rights for the 2023–2027 cycle, but the termination with immediate effect has effectively halted all telecast prospects.

Sources said JioStar cited repeated failure by TSports to adhere to the agreed payment schedule as the reason for scrapping the deal. The decision also impacts coverage of the Women's Premier League, which will now not be available to viewers in Bangladesh. —Agencies

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5 arrested for smuggling fake cigarettes in B'luru

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Five individuals have been arrested at Kempegowda International Airport in the City for allegedly smuggling counterfeit cigarettes from Southeast Asian countries. The City Police seized 20 cartons of fake branded cigarettes worth approximately Rs 50 lakh, intended for sale across various states. The accused, identified as Abdul Basheed, his son Mohammed Ashiq, Mohammed Anwar, Mohammed Ansari, and Ghulam Hussain Khan, were smuggling cigarettes from Singapore, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, and Hong Kong into Bengaluru. They purchased 10,000 cigarettes in Cambodia for Rs 25,000, selling them in Bengaluru at Rs 16 each, while genuine cigarettes cost Rs 22–24. In March, customs officials seized 1.125 kg of hydroponic ganja valued at Rs 39.37 lakh from a passenger arriving from Bangkok. *—ANI*

CM, Vijayendra square off in Bagalkot

In the poll-bound seat, CM rakes up Almati height issue; BYV says Cong neglected dist

BAGALKOT, 30 MARCH

Poll-bound Bagalkot on Monday witnessed a high-decibel electioneering with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and BJP State President BY Vijayendra attempting to woo the voters.

The bypolls for Bagalkot and Davangere South assembly constituencies will take place on 9 April. They were mandated by the deaths of MLAs HY Meti and Shamanur Shivashankarappa respectively. Meti's son Umesh will contest against BJP's Veeranna Charantimath.

State BJP President BY Vijayendra and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah campaign separately for their party's respective candidates for Bagalkot, on Monday *—X @BYVIJAYENDRA@SIDDARAMAIAH*

ALMATI TO POVERTY: CM SETS THE TONE

Sporting a vermillion on his forehead, Siddaramaiah addressed a public meeting in the district headquarters when campaigning for Umesh.

The Congress supported the Below Poverty Line families through the five guarantees and indirectly gave them the benefit of Rs 5,000 to Rs 6,000 a month, he said.

Touching upon the issue of raising the height of Almatti Dam on Krishna River, Siddaramaiah alleged that the BJP government at the Centre stalled it by not issuing a gazette notification even.

"DyCM DK Shivakumar and I met the Central ministers several times but to no avail," he said. "BJP announced land compensation but didn't pay the money."

He called on people to ask Charantimath why it has not been notified. He also alleged that there was no development in the State during BJP's tenure from 2019 to 2023. He recalled HY Meti's contributions while urging people to vote for Umesh.

CM'S REBIRTH, BUT NO DVPT: BYV HITS BACK

BJP leaders and workers took out a march in the city holding party flags, posters and banners.

Speaking to reporters, Vijayendra said that even though Bagalkot district gave Siddaramaiah a "political rebirth", it has been neglected by the government. Siddaramaiah had contested the 2018 assembly election from the Badami assembly segment in the district and won.

He said voters were aware of ground realities and said "no tactics or conspiracies of the Congress will work".

"Even Congress members want" Charantimath to win, Vijayendra said, alleging that the Congress was using money and "muscle power" to win the bypoll set to be held on 9 April. *—PTI*

Parents chain girl for 10 yrs over 'black magic'

BELAGAVI, 30 MARCH

A couple in Belagavi district was found to have kept their daughter chained inside their house for nearly a decade, citing fears of "black magic" (locally referred to as "baanamathi").

The incident underscores the persistence of superstition despite some social and educational progress.

The incident occurred in the jurisdiction of the Kagawad police station and came to light on Sunday.

The victim, Sneha, was a college-going student about 10 years ago when she began exhibiting unusual behaviour, including erratic movements and dancing, the family said, according to Belagavi SP. She is now believed to be around her 30s.

Believing that she had been affected by black magic, the parents sought the advice of a self-styled godman, who allegedly told them that removing the curse would cost lakhs of rupees.

Unable to afford the suggested remedy, the family chose to confine her at home.

The father, Sidrayya, claimed that whenever the chains were removed, Sneha would turn violent and throw stones, attack others, and attempt to run away. This left her family members leaving them with no option but to restrain her.

However, the incident has raised serious concerns about the continued prevalence of blind beliefs and the lack of mental health awareness in rural areas.

Experts have said that such behaviour may be indicative of an underlying psychological conditions that immediate require medical intervention and care. *—SALAR NEWS*

BDA floats Rs 3,348 cr for biz corridor

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

The Bengaluru Development Authority (BDA) has floated tenders for the long-pending Bengaluru Business Corridor (BBC), previously known as Peripheral Ring Road (PRR).

The BDA floated a tender for Package 1 of BBC, which is set to span about 20kms and covers a stretch from Tumakuru Road to Bellary Road, according to the release. It is estimated to cost Rs 3,348 crore and will be executed under Design, Build, Operate and Transfer (DBOT) model and includes 10 years of operations and maintenance (O&M).

The tender is likely to be finalised by May 2026 and the project deadline has been set for 36 months (three years).

Once completed, the 73-km corridor is expected to connect Tumakuru Road, Ballari Road, Old Madras Road and Hosur Road.

Overall, the government expects the BBC to reduce City congestion by 40 per cent. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has also revised the land acquisition norms for the project to ensure its timely completion.

- The tender is likely to be finalised by May and the project deadline has been set for 36 months. However, the estimated cost for the entire project has skyrocketed over the last 18 years

However, the estimated cost for the entire project has skyrocketed as it has run into numerous hurdles for the past 18 years, and previous calls for tenders did not receive bidders. *—Salar News*

Man dies of heart attack in Nanjangud chariot fest

MYSURU, 30 MARCH

A person died due to a heart attack while attending the annual 'Sri Srikanteshwara Swamy Gautama Pancha Maha Rathotsava' at the temple town of Nanjangud on Monday.

The special pooja at the temple started early in the morning, followed by the Rathotsava at 6.15am, during which the 90-foot Gautama Ratha moved forward on the street, as devotees offered flowers and fruits to Lord Shiva.

The idols of Ganesha, Subramanya, Chandikeshwara, Parvathi and Srikanteshwara were taken out in a separate chariots adorned with flowers.

The deceased, Nanjundaswamy, 54, had arrived at the Rathostav along with his son and daughter-in-law at 5am. He fell down unconscious on the road along which the chariot moved. He was a resident of Magadi in Bengaluru rural district.

Though the police rushed him to the hospital, doctors there failed to revive him.

Meanwhile, two other people - Ramaswamy of Srirampur and Ningamma of Chikkadi village - suffered injuries during the event Both of them are in a stable condition now.

The police made strategic arrangements to ensure law and order. *—Salar News*

Chariot procession at Nanjangud, on Monday *—SALAR*

HEBBAL GOES DRY

GBA authorities drain the Hebbal lake for desilting, a move they say will help rejuvenate the City's water bodies. Lakes at Nagawara and Halasuru have been drained as part of the exercise *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Lokayukta catches tax official taking Rs 6L bribe

HUBBALLI, 30 MARCH

The Deputy Commissioner of the Commercial Tax Department, Bharath Kumar Hegde, was caught on Monday while allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 6 lakh, Lokayukta officials said.

Hegde, 48, was trapped while receiving the money from Ankola-based businessman Vishwajit Nayak, 53, following a complaint lodged with the Lokayukta, Bengaluru Lokayukta Superintendent of Police Shiv Prakash Devaraj said.

"Acting on a credible complaint, our team conducted a trap and caught the accused officer while accepting Rs 6 lakh," Devraj said.

According to officials, Nayak had purchased eight tipper trucks in 2019 and was eligible for an Input Tax Credit (ITC) of around Rs 60 lakh, of which he had claimed Rs 34 lakh.

The Commercial Tax Department had registered a case alleging that the ITC was claimed illegally and had initiated an inquiry.

A team led by Bengaluru Lokayukta SP Shiv Prakash Devaraj carried out the operation and caught the accused red handed during the transaction,.

A case was registered and a probe is underway. *—PTI*

36 injured as bus plunges off bridge in Shivamogga

SHIVAMOGGA, 30 MARCH

Thirty-six people were injured on Monday after a private bus allegedly went out of control off a bridge in Karnataka's Shivamogga on Monday.

The incident occurred at around 1.30pm near Kagehalla in Veerapura village of Bhadravati taluk, police said.

According to police, the bus, carrying 40 passengers, was travelling from Channagiri in Davanagere district to Bhadravati when the driver allegedly lost control of the vehicle near a bridge across a stream. The bus hit the bridge's side barrier and overturned into the stream below, which had a very low water level, near the outskirts of the village

A total of 36 people, including the driver and conductor, were injured in the accident, a senior police officer said. Of them, 25 sustained minor injuries and were shifted to a nearby hospital for treatment. The doctors are monitoring their condition.

A case has been registered at the Bhadravati Rural police station, and further investigation is underway, police officials said. *—PTI*

Govt's SSLC 3rd language rule will hurt Hindi: Ashoka

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka on Monday criticised the State government's decision to implement a grading system for third language in SSLC, alleging that it has adversely affected students.

Ashoka said the move to effectively remove the weightage of Hindi as a third language has created confusion among students, who were already in the middle of their examinations.

He alleged that the decision was not taken in the interest of Kannada but for political reasons, and pointed out that lakhs of students had already been preparing for Hindi.

Ashoka also invoked historical context, stating that several Congress leaders had supported the promotion of Hindi in the past.

He questioned the practicality of the move for students aspiring for national-level services.

School Education Minister S Madhu Bangarappa said that the third language will be included in the grading system from the ongoing SSLC examinations itself. The SSLC examination has been held for 625 marks for six subjects. 100 marks were allotted for the third language, but students will be given grades like A, B, C and D, system for it.

BJP would implement the National Education Policy in future, Ashoka said. *—PTI*

Car driver chased by auto drivers, assaulted in B'luru

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

In a case of road rage, a car driver was allegedly chased and assaulted by two autorickshaw drivers following a minor incident on Sarjapur Road in the City. The incident occurred on 25 March at around 8.20pm when Shriraj Bhardwaj, from Ajmer, Rajasthan, and his colleague encountered an autorickshaw coming from the wrong side, police said.

Bhardwaj lodged an online complaint on 26 March. A senior police officer confirmed that a Non-Cognisable Report (NCR) has been registered at Bellandur Police Station, with further investigation ongoing.

Bhardwaj claimed the episode began with a minor touch between vehicles that caused no damage. "What followed was not an argument, it was a chase," he said, alleging the autorickshaw attempted to block their car, hit it, and tried to open the doors. He said another autorickshaw joined the chase, blocking their path near Sarjapur Bridge, where one driver smashed his car's windshield with a concrete stone.

Bhardwaj added he was assaulted outside a gated office space at RGA Tech Park, leaving him injured. The police have traced the autorickshaw driver, but Bhardwaj has said he now plans to leave the City. *—PTI*

MANGO DAYS!

India's favourite seasonal fruit — mangoes — are now appearing across the City. Around 8–10 varieties from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu are being sold on Jayamahal Road on Monday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

ATTIBELE HORROR

Family attempts suicide over debt; 2 live, 2 die

BENGALURU, 30 MARCH

Two women were found dead with their throats slit, while two others of the family escaped with injuries on the outskirts of the city, in an alleged attempt to commit suicide in the face of mounting debt.

Giving details the police said on Monday, the incident occurred in Mallenahalli village under Attibele police station limits of Bengaluru Rural district on Sunday.

Asha, 55 and her daughter Varshita, 32 were found dead at home with their throats slit. Asha's son Mohan, 27; and 10-year-old grandson Mayank Gowda survived with injuries, the police said.

Knives were found at the spot, indicating that the injuries may have been inflicted by Mohan before he attempted to die by suicide, police said.

According to police, Mohan had been running a chit fund on a large scale for the past four to five years.

"The preliminary inquiry revealed that Mohan had suffered heavy losses and was finding it difficult to repay the debts. The four of them recorded a video stating that they were under heavy debt, and could not continue living. After recording the video, they locked the door and attempted suicide," Superintendent of Police (Bengaluru Rural) Chandrakanth MV said.

The police said that when they rushed to the spot, they found Asha and her daughter were dead.

Injured Mohan and Mayank were taken to the hospital by their uncle. "They are currently undergoing treatment at Narayana Hospital," he said.

"We will investigate all aspects to determine the exact cause behind the incident," Chandrakanth said. *—PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777

— PTI

LS passes Insolvency Law Amendments Bill

FM says the bill will help maximise value for stakeholders & improve governing process

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

The Lok Sabha on Monday passed a bill to amend the insolvency law to provide for strict timelines, an out-of-court settlement option and enable the framework for cross-border insolvency processes.

Piloting the bill in the Lok Sabha, Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala said that 12 amendments are being made in the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), which came into force in 2016, that would help maximise the value for stakeholders and improve the governing process itself.

Amendments seek to strengthen the existing insolvency framework, as well as address practical challenges, and incorporate evolving global best practices, the minister said, and added that the law has been a major factor in improving the health of the country's banking sector.

Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala —PTI

The Lower House cleared the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2025, as reported by the Select Committee.

On 12 August, 2025, the government introduced the bill in the Lok Sabha to amend the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), proposing a raft of changes, including provisions to reduce the time taken for admission of insolvency resolution applications. The bill was referred to a select committee of the Lok Sabha, which submitted its report in December 2025.

IBC has been amended seven times so far. The bill replaces the underutilised fast-track process with a new creditor-initiated insolvency framework, featuring out-of-court initiation, debtor-in-possession and creditor-in-control model, where management continues to vest in the existing Board of Directors or partners with safeguards, and defined timelines.

> **FCRA amendment bill introduced in Parliament targets minority communities and charitable organisations.**
>
> - KC Venugopal, AICC General Secretary

Among other changes, an application for initiating the insolvency resolution process has to be admitted within 14 days if the default by a company has been established, and appeals related to IBC before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) have to be decided upon within three months. —PTI

BJP, CHURCHES SPAR OVER FCRA BILL

KOTTAYAM, 30 MARCH

BJP state Vice President **Shone George** on Monday said concerns over the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment (FCRA) Bill are "baseless" and asserted that the proposed changes will regulate foreign funds received by NGOs.

His statement comes amid criticism from Christian organisations and political leaders, who have alleged that the FCRA Bill, introduced in the Lok Sabha, targets minorities and has become a major issue in Kerala's Assembly election campaign.

George, who is contesting from the Pala constituency, said Christian churches and institutions have no reason to worry as their accounts and financial dealings are transparent.

He alleged that funds for anti-national activities are being routed into the country through certain NGOs.

Accusing the Congress and Left parties of "spreading misinformation", he said they were trying to create unnecessary fear among minorities.

He said Union Home Minister Amit Shah has clarified that the amendments are not intended to target genuine organisations functioning lawfully.

Meanwhile, Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, the supreme head of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, said the proposed amendments could adversely affect church institutions. —PTI

BJD FUMES AFTER DUBEY LINKS PATNAIK TO CIA

BHUBANESWAR/ NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

BJD President Naveen Patnaik condemned BJP MP Nishikant Dubey's "outrageous" remarks against former Odisha CM Biju Patnaik, suggesting the MP consult a "mental doctor." Dubey, in a statement on 27 March, had claimed that Biju Patnaik was the link between former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the CIA during the war against China in the 1960s. As the issue snowballed into a major controversy with BJD MPs staging a walkout from the Rajya Sabha on Monday, alleging "disrespectful and defamatory" remarks made by Dubey against Biju Patnaik, the BJP lawmaker in a post on X clarified that he made the statement while exposing the "misdeeds of the Congress and not Biju Patnaik." —PTI

BJP Chief Nitin Nabin resigns as Bihar MLA

PATNA, 30 MARCH

BJP national President Nitin Nabin resigned as a member of the Bihar Assembly on Monday, two weeks after he was elected to the Rajya Sabha. His resignation from the Bankipur seat was submitted to Assembly Speaker Prem Kumar by state BJP chief Sanjay Saraogi. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar also resigned from the state legislative council on Monday. Nabin thanked the electorate for the privilege of serving as their representative for five consecutive terms. Both Nabin and the JD(U) supremo were elected to the Rajya Sabha on 16 March. Nabin said that he would remain committed to the development of the Bankipur constituency and Bihar in the "new role that the party has assigned to me". —PTI

NCP legislators ready for merger with NCP(SP)

MUMBAI, 30 MARCH

Two months after the plane crash and subsequent death of then deputy chief minister and NCP chief Ajit Pawar, two NCP leaders have voiced support for the merger of the party on Sunday, now headed by Sunetra Pawar, with the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP). Following Ajit Pawar's death, NCP (SP) leaders claimed a merger had been in development. While NCP officials initially dismissed this, Maval MLA and Ajit loyalist Sunil Shelke recently suggested that uniting the parties under Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar is still a viable path for growth. NCP leaders' remarks came amid a row over photographs of Ajit Pawar and Sunetra missing from the banner of a party event in Raigad district. —PTI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi rides a bicycle with UDF candidate Chandy Oommen in Puthuppally, in Kerala, on Monday —PTI

RaGa questions PM's silence on Sabarimala

PATHANAMTHITTA, 30 MARCH

Launching a sharp attack on the prime minister, senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday alleged that Narendra Modi remained silent on the Sabarimala issue during his Kerala visit, indicating that the BJP-LDF works together.

Speaking at a Congress election meeting in Adoor here, Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, claimed that the party would be facing a "combination" of CPI(M) and BJP in the April 9 Assembly elections in the state.

He said that the Prime Minister, wherever he goes talks about temples and religion.

"But somehow, he has forgotten about what happened in Sabarimala during his visit to Palakkad," he said.

"He has forgotten that the Left Front leaders stole from the Ayyappa temple. He has forgotten that the Left Front leaders took the gold of the Ayyappa temple and replaced it with brass," he alleged saying that the prime minister's silent showed BJP and LDF were hand in glove and that he cared two hoots about Hinduism or temples.

Addressing another rally in Puthuppally, Gandhi alleged the proposed FCRA (Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act) amendment aimed to ensure that only the RSS gets foreign funds, while other organisations would be restricted. The crowd cheered when he said he wished to see a woman CM in Kerala. —PTI

'JOBS FOR ASSAM'S YOUTH IS CONG'S TOP AGENDA'

GUWAHATI, 30 MARCH

The Congress will focus on creating jobs for youths in Assam to help them earn a decent livelihood, Congress central observer for coming Assam polls and Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister **DK Shivakumar** said here.

Shivakumar said thousands of youths leave the northeastern state in search of a better "quality of life", including Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's son, who is studying in Bengaluru.

"Our assurance to the youth of Assam is employment. With a lot of difficulties, they complete their education here. Many of them then go to the southern states, Mumbai and Delhi for employment," Shivakumar said.

He said state's working class is not getting sufficient wages. —PTI

Vijay starts poll rally from Perambur

CHENNAI, 30 MARCH

TVK Chief, actor-politician Vijay on Monday filed his first nomination to contest the Assembly polls from Perambur constituency in Chennai and appealed to the people to give an opportunity to his party TVK and vote for the party's whistle symbol on 23 April.

After filing his papers, Vijay, addressing the people from his open-top campaign vehicle, reiterated his allegation that the DMK was an evil force.

He slammed the DMK regime, alleging there was no safety for women, and hit out at the government over the degraded law and order situation and for the alleged prevalence of drugs.

He is also contesting from Tiruchirappalli-East in central Tamil Nadu, a key part of the fertile Cauvery delta region. Meanwhile, Aadhav Arjuna, top TVK leader, filed nomination from Villivakkam Assembly constituency, also in north Chennai.

VIJAY DECLARES ASSETS

Vijay has declared total assets worth approximately Rs 603.20 crore in his election affidavit filed. In the affidavit he disclosed possession of movable assets valued at Rs 404.58 crore, immovable assets of approximately Rs 198.62 crore. Specific liabilities listed as being under dispute include a sum of Rs 1.50 crore for the assessment year 2015-16. His wife, Sangeetha, has declared separate assets totalling Rs 15.76 crore, including movable property worth Rs 15.51 crore and immovable property valued at Rs 25 lakh. No pending criminal cases against Vijay, nor any conviction of any offence, were listed. —PTI

TN CM MK Stalin files his nomination papers from Kolathur constituency ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, declaring movable and immovable assets worth over Rs 6.26 crore, in Chennai, on Monday —PTI

TVK Chief and actor Vijay files his nomination papers for the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections from the Perambur constituency at the Returning Officer's office, in Chennai, on Monday —PTI

Didi pitches for Bengali identity

DEBRA, 30 MARCH

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday raised the issues of Bengali identity, SIR of electoral rolls and the TMC's national ambitions during her poll campaign, and declared that after winning the elections next month, her party will work towards "capturing Delhi".

Addressing a rally at Debra in Paschim Medinipur, a politically significant belt where the BJP had made deep inroads in 2021 before the TMC clawed back ground in the Lok Sabha polls, Banerjee framed the election not merely as a contest for power in Bengal, but as a fight against what she described as the BJP's attempt to control the state politically, culturally and electorally.

WB CM Mamata Banerjee addresses a public meeting ahead of the Assembly Election, in Paschim Medinipur district, on Monday —PTI

"After winning in West Bengal, we will unite everyone across the country to capture Delhi," she said, in remarks that underlined her effort to position herself as one of the principal anti-BJP voices nationally.

At the heart of her attack was the allegation that the Centre and the EC were working in tandem to weaken the state government and manipulate the electoral process. —PTI

EC transfers 173 police station heads across WB

The Election Commission (EC) in New Delhi ordered the transfer of 173 police station heads across West Bengal on Sunday to ensure free and fair Assembly polls. State CM Mamata Banerjee alleged that such reshuffles are politically motivated. Meanwhile, Qazi Abdur Rahim, MLA for West Bengal's Baduria in North 24 Parganas, resigned from Trinamool Congress on Sunday. He joined Congress on Monday. The state Assembly elections will be held on 23 and 29 April. —PTI

CM threatening voters in WB: BJP to EC

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

A delegation of BJP central and West Bengal leaders on Monday met Election Commission officials here and alleged that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and TMC leaders were "intimidating" voters in a bid to dissuade them from voting for the saffron party in the upcoming assembly polls in the state.

In a petition submitted to the Election Commission (EC) the BJP delegation urged the poll panel to debar Banerjee from participating in poll campaigns and order registration of a FIR against the TMC leaders.

The BJP also sought enhanced deployment of central forces in "sensitive and vulnerable areas", claiming that West Bengal Police has become "ineffective" as it is "complicit" with the ruling TMC.

"Deploy more IAS and IPS officers as ECI observers to ensure that the state administration and police act impartially and decisively against all acts of violence or intimidation; and closely monitor polling and counting processes to ensure the sanctity and credibility of the electoral process," the BJP petition said. —PTI

BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari files his nomination from Nandigram for the upcoming Assembly polls, in Purba Medinipur district —PTI

PUDUCHERRY POLLS

23% candidates face criminal cases, 41% crorepatis: ADR

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

About 23 per cent of candidates contesting the Puducherry Assembly polls have declared criminal cases against their names, while 41 per cent are crorepatis, a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms said.

The NGO working on electoral reforms analysed the affidavits of 291 out of the 294 candidates contesting the 30 seats in the elections scheduled for 9 April. The results will be out on 4 May.

Out of the 294 contesting candidates, 34 are from national parties, 63 from state parties, 80 from registered unrecognised parties, while 117 are Independents.

The report said 66 candidates (23 per cent) have declared criminal cases against their names, compared to 54 (17 per cent) out of 323 candidates in 2021. Among the major parties, 3 out of 21 candidates from the Congress, 4 out of 16 from the All-India NR Congress (AINR), 6 out of 12 from the DMK, and 5 out of 10 candidates from the BJP have declared criminal cases in their affidavits. While 3 candidates face cases related to crime against women, 2 have been named in murder cases.

On the financial status of the candidates, it said 119 (41 per cent) nominees are crorepatis, compared to 74 (23 per cent) out of 323 in 2021. —PTI

Out of the 294 candidates, 34 are from national parties, 63 from state parties, 80 from registered unrecognised parties & 117 are Independents —PTI

TELANGANA PASSES GIG WORKERS BILL FOR WELFARE, SECURITY

HYDERABAD, 30 MARCH

The Telangana Legislative Assembly on Monday passed a Bill aimed at the welfare of gig workers.

State Labour Minister G Vivek Venkatswamy, who moved the Telangana Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration, Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2026, said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had met gig workers during his 'Bharat Jodo Yatra'.

On Gandhi's suggestions Chief Minister, A Revanth Reddy held a meeting with aggregators and unions, following which the government prepared a draft Bill.

The aggregators were facing losses and could come under further financial stress if the government imposed a heavy cess. There are about four lakh gig workers in Telangana.

The Bill proposes the formation of a board comprising representatives of aggregators, workers and the government to address issues faced by gig workers.

Gig workers would need to register with the government to obtain a unique ID, and avail of specific social security schemes.

The Assembly sent the Telangana Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) to a select committee. —PTI

—PTI

Rain and snow drench Kashmir for second day

SRINAGAR, 30 MARCH

Kashmir experienced continuous rain in plains and snowfall in higher regions for the second consecutive day, officials reported. Light to moderate rains affected most parts of the valley, while some mountainous areas saw further snowfall. The weather has reduced the rainfall deficit in Jammu and Kashmir from 50 per cent to 45 per cent for March. The Meteorological Department predicts widespread rainfall or snowfall in the next 24 hours, with moderate intensity expected but heavy rain possible in some areas. Farmers have been advised to suspend all farm activities until Tuesday. The weather should improve from Tuesday, with brief rain spells predicted on 1 and 2 April, and scattered light rain and snow from 3 to 7 April. — *PTI*

Two men rape colleague's wife in UP's Bhadohi

BHADOHI, 30 MARCH

Two employees of a carpet export firm allegedly entered a rented room and raped a 32-year-old woman, police said. Superintendent of Police Abhinav Tyagi stated her husband, who works nearby, lives with her in a rented accommodation. The incident reportedly happened on 25 March when she was alone at home. The accused, Heera Lal, 32 and Vivekanand Singh, 35, both colleagues of her husband, gagged her and took turns raping her. She disclosed the assault to her husband upon his return, and a police complaint was lodged at Gopiganj station. The woman's medical examination is scheduled, and efforts are ongoing to arrest the fleeing suspects. — *PTI*

Punjab Congress leader killed in Ludhiana attack

CHANDIGARH, 30 MARCH

Parminder Tiwari, Congress block president of Machhiwara, was murdered with an axe in Ludhiana. Two unidentified attackers on a motorcycle assaulted him while he sat on a chair on Sunday evening. He sustained severe head injuries and died en route to hospital, police confirmed. A case has been registered, and investigations are underway. Punjab Congress president Amrinder Singh Raja Warring condemned the attack, criticising the law and order situation, and expressed condolences to Tiwari's family. Opposition leader Partap Singh Bajwa called the killing a sign of Punjab's worsening lawlessness. He also criticised the government's response and lamented the loss of a dedicated Congress party worker. — *PTI*

—FREEPIK

Delhi man held for flaunting gun on social media

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Ritik Kharab, 26, was arrested in Dwarka for allegedly sharing photos and videos on social media brandishing a pistol. Police recovered a pistol and two live cartridges during his detention on 29 March. Kharab admitted procuring the weapon through a Haryana-based supplier. He revealed he had previously used the firearm for celebratory firing at his wedding and aimed to project influence among peers. The police said the accused's actions were aimed at creating fear. This highlights concerns over firearm misuse and the increasing prevalence of social media-related offences. — *PTI*

Centre allows temporary supply of kerosene

21 kerosene-free states to get supply soon to help hotels

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

—IMAGE AI

The Centre has allowed ad-hoc allocation of public distribution system (PDS) kerosene in 21 states and Union Territories, including regions classified as kerosene-free, to support household cooking and lighting amid global energy supply pressures.

The move follows the month-long war in West Asia, disrupting the energy supply chain, particularly LPG.

India imports 60 per cent of its cooking gas, 85-90 per cent of which comes from the Gulf countries.

The war has stopped those supplies, forcing the curtailment of supplies to commercial users like hotels and restaurants.

While domestic households have been given priority in LPG supply, the limited stocks have led to panic buying and long queues.

The government allowed the temporary use of kerosene for cooking and lighting throughout the country to ease pressure on LPG.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has issued a notification allowing temporary exemptions under the Petroleum Act, 1934 and Petroleum Rules, 2002, to facilitate the distribution of PDS kerosene in 21 states and UTs, according to a gazette notification of March 29.

Under the notification, up to two designated PSU oil marketing company (OMC) service stations per district, preferably company-owned and operated, will be permitted to store up to 5,000 litres of kerosene, subject to safety conditions.

Agents and dealers have been exempted from obtaining licences for decanting kerosene at these designated stations, while tank vehicles with existing licences will also not require additional permits for the same purpose.

The order takes immediate effect and will remain valid for 60 days or until further notice.

AVIATION FUEL

There is adequate Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) for the next 60 days in the country, Minister of Civil Aviation Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu informed the Rajya Sabha on Monday.

He was responding to a supplementary query on the supply situation of ATF in India amid the oil crisis due to the West Asia war. —*PTI*

Indian killed in Iranian attack on Kuwait water plant

DUBAI, 30 MARCH

An Indian was killed in Kuwait in Iranian strikes on a power and water desalination plant, taking the total number of Indian fatalities in the conflict in West Asia to eight.

Kuwait's Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy said a service building at the facility was damaged in Sunday's attack, Kuwait's state-run KUNA news agency reported.

The Indian embassy in Kuwait confirmed the death of the Indian.

Kuwaiti officials described the strikes on the power and water desalination plant as "brutal." However, they did not identify the plant.

Fatima Jawhar Hayat, a spokesperson at the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, said the strike resulted in the death of an Indian. —*PTI*

Census data about individuals will remain confidential

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

- On including caste in the Census and the apprehension that people may not give correct info, the Registrar General said that caste data will be collected during the Census' second phase

The Registrar General of India and Census Commissioner, Mrityunjay Kumar Narayan, on Monday advised citizens to give accurate information to Census enumerators, asserting that the data about individual will remain confidential and cannot be used as evidence or to get benefit under any scheme.

Addressing a press conference, as the first phase of the country's 16th Census is all set to begin in April, including Delhi, the commissioner said under Section 15 of the Census Act, all data about individuals remains confidential.

The Census will be conducted in Delhi from 16 April to 15 May. "All data about individuals are confidential. It cannot be shared under the Right to Information Act, used as evidence in a court and cannot be shared with any organisation, be it government or private," he said.

Only statistical aggregate data will be used for tabulation purposes, he added.

Asked about caste being included in the Census and the apprehension that people may not give correct information, the Registrar General said that caste data will be collected during the second phase.

For the first time, self-enumeration has been introduced where the public can digitally submit information during the 15-day window preceding the first phase of census house listing and housing census, notified by each state and Union Territory, he said.

He said that no decision regarding updating the National Population Register has been taken so far, and added that it does not connect with the SIR undertaken by the ECI. — *PTI*

Delhi Police produce Shabir Ahmad Lone, linked to the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), at the Patiala House Court in New Delhi on Monday —*PTI*

LeT handler Shabir held in Delhi; forex seized

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

- Lone has undergone the terror training 'Daura-e-Aam' (basic terror training) and 'Daura-e-Khaas' (advanced training) at the Muzaffarabad LeT camp in Pakistan occupied Kashmir

The Delhi Police's Special Cell has arrested a suspected Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) handler, Shabir Ahmed Lone, from the Ghazipur area here, officials said on Monday.

Describing Lone as a "hardcore, highly trained terrorist," the officials said that he reportedly established links with handlers operating on behalf of the ISI.

"Lone, also known by aliases Raja and Kashmiri, is a resident of Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir and was allegedly operating as the handler of a recently busted module involved in pasting anti-national posters in Delhi and Kolkata," a senior police officer said.

According to the officer, a team from the New Delhi Range of the Special Cell arrested Shabir Ahmed Lone on 29 March in Ghazipur.

Lone was wanted in connection with the LeT module that had been recently unearthed in the metro poster case on 22 February, the officer said.

"The police recovered foreign currencies and other incriminating material from him. These included approximately 2,300 units of Bangladeshi Taka, 1,400 units of Nepalese currency, 5,000 units of Pakistani currency, and 3,000 units of Indian currency," they said.

A Nepalese SIM card was also seized, raising suspicions about cross-border communication and operational coordination.

Lone has undergone terror training "Daura-e-Aam" (basic terror training) and "Daura-e-Khaas" (advanced terror training) at the Muzaffarabad LeT camp in Pak occupied Kashmir. — *PTI*

Indira assassin's kin loses bid to keep his name secret in NZ

WELLINGTON, 30 MARCH

New Zealand authorities say Baltej Singh played a central role in an international drug-smuggling network —*X/@NOTICERNEWS*

The identity of the nephew of one of Indira Gandhi's assassins, convicted in a drug case, was revealed after he lost a bid in a New Zealand court to keep his name secret, a local media report said.

Baltej Singh, who is serving a 22-year prison sentence for importing over 700 kg of methamphetamine, the largest amount ever seized by New Zealand authorities, was fighting for permanent name suppression, New Zealand's Stuff web portal reported on Saturday.

Earlier, Singh, nephew of Satwant Singh, one of the bodyguards who assassinated former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984, was granted permanent name suppression by the High Court after arguing that he and his family would face extreme hardship if his identity was revealed.

The New Zealand authorities appealed against the ruling, and last November, the Court of Appeal ruled that Singh could be named, it said.

Singh, a former Auckland businessman, sought permission to take his fight to the Supreme Court, but he has now abandoned that appeal.

Stuff also opposed the bid to suppress Baltej Singh's identity, it said.

The prosecution had earlier argued in court that Indian media had already disclosed Singh's identity.

In an affidavit to the court, Baltej Singh's father had argued that his family had "become notorious" among Sikhs and Hindus worldwide and were subject to constant threats from them, the report said. — *PTI*

Delhi court extends foreigners' custody in terrorism case

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

A Delhi court extended the NIA custody of seven foreign nationals involved in a terror conspiracy case, highlighting its sensitive nature and the need for further investigation. Special Judge Prashant Sharma stated, "Several questions need to be answered to ascertain the motive of the accused behind coming to India," including why they travelled to Myanmar, their purpose in using drones, and whether they had links with Indian insurgent or ethnic groups.

The court permitted 10 days of custodial interrogation, noting that "the facts of this case are sensitive in nature," and ordered the accused's production after interrogation concludes on 6 April. The court also approved the agency's plea to hold proceedings at its headquarters, citing national security concerns.

Earlier, the court approved 11-day custody for the accused, including US and Ukrainian nationals, who entered India on tourist visas, flew to Mizoram, and then illegally crossed into Myanmar for training with Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAO).

The FIR alleges they supported proscribed Indian insurgent groups with weapons and training, attracting Section 18 of the UAPA. The court emphasised that the allegations should not be viewed in isolation, as they involve national security and India's interests.

An independent translator was also requested for fair proceedings. The probe aims to clarify the accused's motives, their connections, and the impact on India's security landscape, with the case revealing complex international links. — *PTI*

Senior Maoist surrenders in Andhra

AMARAVATI, 30 MARCH

—PTI

Nine Maoists, including senior leader C Narayana Rao, surrendered to the police, Andhra Pradesh DGP Harish Kumar Gupta announced. He claimed that "Left Wing Extremism (LWE) has come to an end in the state," adding that the central government's promise to eradicate LWE by 31 March 2026, has been fulfilled with the state's efforts.

Rao, former secretary of Andhra Odisha Border (AOB), operated for 36 years, involved in major offences like the 2018 murder of MLA Kidari Sarveswara Rao, 2001 killing of CI Gandhi, and 1997 killing of Head Constable Narendra Das. He joined the Maoist movement in 1990, rising from Area Committee Member to Central Committee Member and AOB Secretary before surrendering.

Gupta highlighted that the police's call for Maoists to surrender has been effective, with underground movement reduced to zero active cadres. Efforts of Greyhounds, SIB, and district police, alongside assistance to neighbouring states, contributed to this success.

The police reported 18 exchanges of fire, 81 arrests, and 106 surrenders since operations began, with surrendered cadres involved in ambushes and attacks.

Seized materials included shells, ammunition, detonators, gelatin sticks, and communication equipment. Gupta credited disillusionment, declining support, and attractive rehabilitation policies for Maoist surrenders, emphasising the sustained pressure and total eradication of active Maoist presence in Andhra Pradesh. — *PTI*

VIZAG HORROR

Navy man kills lover, chops her body, stores it in fridge

VISAKHAPATNAM, 30 MARCH

Inside a rented flat in Visakhapatnam, a brutal crime unfolded piece by piece. And for hours no one had any idea what had happened —*x*

An Indian Navy staffer allegedly murdered a 28-year-old woman, dismembered her body, and attempted to destroy evidence in the Gajuwaka area here, a police official said on Monday.

The suspect procured a knife online, dismembered the body, stored some parts in a refrigerator, and burnt the head and hands at a lonely place near Adavivaram on Sunday.

The accused, identified as Chintada Ravindra, posted at INS Dega, had been in contact with the deceased Polipalli Mounika since 2021 after meeting her through a dating application, police said.

"A Navy staffer (Ravindra) killed Mounika on Sunday at his residence after an altercation and later dismembered the body, and disposed of the parts," the official said.

The two developed a relationship over time and frequently met at various public locations across Visakhapatnam, such as parks and theatres, police said.

The suspect said the woman had allegedly taken Rs 3.5 lakh from him and had threatened to reveal their relationship to his wife, leading to frequent quarrels between them, the official said.

On the day of the incident, the accused allegedly called her to his flat, where a heated argument broke out and he smothered her to death, the official added. —*PTI*

Stray bullet kills ex-Brigadier in U'khand road rage

DEHRADUN, 30 MARCH

A retired brigadier was killed here after getting caught in cross firing between two car occupants during a road rage incident on Monday, police said.

The incident took place in the Johri village on Mussoorie Road when an argument broke out between the occupants of a Delhi-registered Fortuner and a Scorpio N over giving way. As the argument escalated, the Scorpio occupants allegedly chased the Fortuner and fired at its tyres, but a bullet struck retired brigadier Mukesh Joshi, 74, who was out for his morning walk.

Joshi was taken to a hospital, where he died, they added.

Police, after a bullet hit the Fortuner's tyre, the driver lost control of the vehicle and crashed into a roadside tree.

The occupants of the Scorpio then assaulted the people inside the Fortuner and vandalised the vehicle, police said. — *PTI*

—JULIA BURULEVA/INSTAGRAM

Russian photographer paints elephant pink in Jaipur for photoshoot

Russian draws flak for painting elephant pink

JAIPUR, 30 MARCH

Russian photographer Julia Buruleva has come under criticism over a recent photoshoot in Jaipur where an elephant was painted bright pink for an art project, said sources.

Sources Buruleva, who had come to Jaipur for an art expedition, shared behind-the-scenes of the photoshoot and the story behind the idea for it on her Instagram.

She said that she got the idea after spending weeks taking in the city's vibrant colours and imagery.

According to Buruleva, "a pink elephant against classic Rajasthani gates, just couldn't pass by without including." She also said that elephants were a key symbol of Rajasthan.

However, the shoot got backlash, with people accusing her of promoting animal abuse.

Regarding the animal welfare concerns, she said that, "For anyone worried about the elephant - we used organic, locally-made paint, the same kind locals use for festivals, so it was absolutely safe for the animal." — *AGENCIES*

Kerala youth voters caught between apathy & doubt

In Kerala, as the Assembly polls approach on 9 April, a sense of tension is visible among some young voters — between disillusionment and duty.

For some, the act of voting itself feels increasingly hollow.

Archit, a 23-year-old integrated MBA student from Kollam, was recently added to the electoral roll after the Special Intensive Revision (SIR). But he says he sees little reason to take part.

Officials, however, say such views underline the need to strengthen awareness about the value of voting, especially among young people. The Election Commission (EC) has noted a decline in youth turnout in recent elections, which it attributes to a mix of reluctance and apathy.

Youth organisations say concerns such as limited job opportunities, lack of higher education options and a perceived disconnect with traditional political styles continue to influence how young voters view elections.

At the same time, officials hope sustained outreach will help bridge this gap and improve participation.

"I don't see the point in going to vote. All the parties are working for their own interest and not to benefit the public. I don't see what development they have done till now, so why waste my time? If I do go, I will choose NOTA," Archit told PTI.

He added that several of his friends feel the same way.

For Shreya, a 20-year-old first-time voter from Thiruvananthapuram, the uncertainty is different. While she is keen to vote, she is unsure about which candidate to choose.

"If I vote for a candidate I like, they will only work as per the policies or agenda of their party. But, if I choose NOTA, it will be a waste of my vote," said Shreya.

A similar dilemma was expressed by Aswin Unni, a 25-year-old lawyer from Kochi and not a first-time voter.

He said he prefers a particular candidate but does not agree with the politics of the candidate's party. At the same time, the party he supports does not have a strong candidate in his constituency.

Youth organisations say concerns such as limited job opportunities, lack of higher education options and a perceived disconnect with traditional political styles continue to influence how young voters view elections —AI

"So, I have not yet decided what to do. If there is no clarity by 9 April, then I will choose NOTA," he said.

A growing sense of doubt and disengagement among some young voters is being met with efforts by the EC to encourage greater participation ahead of the Assembly polls.

One such move is an awareness campaign titled "My Vote, My Strength" launched by the EC on 28 March to encourage young voters to participate in the electoral process.

Citing the reasons for the disillusionment among some young voters, V Manu Prasad, state president of the BJP's youth wing, Yuva Morcha, said that the young voters in Kerala do not identify with the style of politics in the state.

"They do not feel that the present form of politics is going to bring any change in their lives.

"On the other hand, the political parties do not take into consideration the issues that concern the youth. They are not ready to discuss the politics of the younger generation," he said.

Prasad said that many youngsters feel that whoever comes to power it would not benefit them, and thus, they refrain from voting.

Prasad said that the BJP and Yuva Morcha have been carrying out awareness programmes to encourage a better turnout among the youth.

Youth Congress state Secretary Nobal Kumar has a similar take on the issue.

He believes that, due to a lack of good education options and job opportunities, many youths are going abroad for studies and employment.

"This reduces the number of young voters, as many of them do not bother to come home just for voting, as they do not believe it will benefit them," Kumar told PTI.

He further said that there are numerous public service commission job aspirants across the state who have cleared the exams and are there in the rank list but have not received appointments due to the non-declaration of vacancies by the government, and so, they will turn up in large numbers to vote against the Left.

On the other hand, Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) National President AA Rahim does not agree with the claims of low turnout among the young voters.

Rahim, a CPI(M) MP in the Rajya Sabha, when asked if there was a reduction in the voting percentage of the youth, he replied in the negative.

The EC campaign, being carried out in partnership with the Kerala State Legal Services Authority and the police, is trying to ensure that every citizen recognises the value of their vote and uses it properly without giving in to any temptations," the poll panel said. —PTI

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Nitish quits as MLC, but when will he resign as CM?

With Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar giving up his membership of the state legislative council, speculations are now rife about who would head the new government, to be formed after the JD(U) President relinquishes the seat of power.

Kumar, who turned 75 on 1 March, took all by surprise a week later when he announced the decision to enter Rajya Sabha, signalling that he wanted to end his innings as the CM, barely four months after getting a fresh mandate in the Assembly polls.

Close aides of the leader have, for some time, been making cryptic remarks about a constitutional provision that allows a person to "remain the chief minister for up to six months after ceasing to be a member of the state legislature".

Such statements, made even by senior ministers like Shravan Kumar, have fuelled speculation that the JD(U), which has only four MLAs fewer than the BJP, could drive a hard bargain before allowing its alliance partner to stake claim to the top post.

However, sources in the NDA say it was unlikely that Kumar, who may get sworn in as a Rajya Sabha MP early next month, would remain in the seat of power for that long even as they are of the view that a change of guard could take place "only after Kharmaas", an unholy month, as per the Hindu calendar.

Kharmaas is an inauspicious month-long period in the Hindu calendar that occurs twice a year when the Sun transits Sagittarius or Pisces. This year, it falls from 15 March to 14 April. During this time, auspicious activities such as weddings, housewarmings and new ventures are avoided, and the period is instead considered suitable for worship, meditation and charity. BJP camp is thrilled at the prospect of finally having its "own chief minister" in the only Hindi heartland state where the seat of power has remained elusive, despite it having been a member of the ruling coalition for nearly two decades.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar —PTI

Names of many probables are doing the rounds, the frontrunner being Samrat Choudhary, the Deputy CM who holds the crucial Home portfolio.

Choudhary is a Koeri, a numerically significant OBC group which has so far not been aligned with any particular party, unlike the Yadavs, who are die-hard supporters of Lalu Prasad's RJD, or the Kurmis who revere Nitish Kumar.

BJP sources admit that by making a Koeri the CM, the party may secure, for a long time, the support of dominant OBC group, besides ending the perception that it was a "pro-upper caste" political force, which puts it at a disadvantage in a state like Bihar, where politics has for decades been influenced by the Mandal agitation of the 1990s.

However, some old-timers in the BJP point out that Choudhary, whom Union Home Minister Amit Shah had famously promised to make a "bada aadmi" (big man) during the assembly elections, may not enjoy much traction with the all-powerful Sangh lobby, given the fact that he spent nearly two decades of his political career in RJD and JD(U), before joining BJP in 2017. Another prominent name that is doing the rounds is that of Nityanand Rai, a former state BJP president, who is understood to be a favourite of Shah, by virtue of having been the Union Minister of State for Home. They cite the example of Rajasthan, where a first-term MLA was made the CM, after a Union minister was rumoured to have flown down to Jaipur carrying a small piece of paper with the name inscribed.

Meanwhile, JD(U) sources assert that they will insist on "a fair share" in the new cabinet, and the supremo's son, Nishant Kumar, who joined the party recently, was likely to be pushed for the Deputy CM's post. —PTI

Displaced men and women with their children from Beirut's southern suburbs wait to receive donated food rations; Children play soccer inside a school converted into a shelter; A family sits around a bonfire outside a tent shelter in Beirut —PTI

Families torn apart, trade halted as war reaches Iraq's border

- The border between Iran and northern Iraq's Kurdish region has long been porous, alive with family ties, trade and smuggling.

To speak with his mother inside Iran, Yaser Fattahi waits in self-exile in Iraq for brief calls arranged by a cousin back home who travels close to the border between the neighbouring countries, where he can pick up a signal to connect them.

Fattahi fled to neighbouring Iraq in December, fearing arrest over his participation in anti-government protests in Iran. A trained nurse, he was caring for wounded protesters in their homes so they wouldn't have to seek care in state-run hospitals that were under surveillance.

Now, as the war intensifies, he worries constantly for his mother's safety amid US and Israeli bombardment.

The war has disrupted telecommunications and concentrated Iranian forces along the frontier, choking off communications and trade for many.

When Fattahi's cousin can make it to the border, he calls over WhatsApp using one phone with an Iraqi SIM card and then connects to Fattahi's mother using another phone with the Iranian cell network.

"The calls last a minute or two," Fattahi said from Sulaymaniyah, in Iraq's Kurdish region along the Iranian border. "She tells me to take care of myself, and that they are okay."

Four days have passed since the last call. Fattahi keeps glancing at his phone. "I thought he would call today but he hasn't," he said.

The border between Iran and northern Iraq's Kurdish region has long been porous, alive with family ties, trade and smuggling. Now families are cut off from loved ones, and traders — even smugglers — hesitate to cross.

Those who travel close to the border to pick up Iraqi cell signals risk being shot, activists said. Others rely on smuggled Starlink connections and pay steep prices to stay in touch.

A FAMILY DIVIDED

In the mountainous Iraqi district of Byara, relatives used to regularly cross the border to visit one another for family gatherings and religious celebrations.

The war has upended those longstanding traditions.

Nyan Fayaq, 25, a law student, stood over giant pots of food as she helped prepare a fast-breaking iftar meal in the final week of Ramadan while dozens of relatives gathered in shimmering Kurdish dress amid rolling green hills dotted with sheep.

Her thoughts were in the Iranian city of Saqqez, where she has family, she has not been able to reach for more than a month.

An Iraqi soldier stands guard atop a damaged building at the Iraqi army base in Habbaniyah after it was hit in an airstrike, in Anbar province, in Iraq —PTI

An Iranian Kurdish man who works in Iraq returned to his hometown of Marivan two weeks ago to fetch his wife to bring her into Iraq because he feared for her safety in Iran. He spoke on condition his name not be used, fearing it might compromise his ability to return.

Since then, he said he has been able to speak with his family only briefly.

A SMUGGLER'S LIFE

The war has also brought the work of cross-border smugglers to a standstill.

Known as kolbars, these porters carry goods — such as cigarettes, electronics, and clothing — across Iran's western provinces. They operate in a legal grey zone and risk death from border guards, harsh weather, and treacherous mountain terrain.

At times, people also rely on kolbars to smuggle themselves across the border.

Being a kolbar is all 25-year-old Bilal Osman has ever known. It is a trade passed down from his father and grandfather.

Last year, he recalls, Iranian forces shot at a caravan of 12 mules while they were transporting goods in the mountains.

A kolbar on the Iranian side, who spoke on condition of anonymity out of security concerns, told The Associated Press that business has all but stopped since the war began because of the increased security presence.

AN ACTIVIST'S MISSION

Shiwa Hassanpour, an activist with the human rights monitor Hengaw Organisation, based in Iraq's Kurdish region, said people have been shot for approaching the border because Iranian forces suspect them of being spies or informants.

Obtaining information from inside Iran has become increasingly difficult, she said. Locals rely on costly virtual private networks, or VPNs, to report events and send videos, meaning news often trickles out slowly. Hassanpour herself has not been able to contact her family for over 20 days.

She said that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard has deployed large numbers of troops across cities in Iran's Kurdish region. These measures intensified after Iranian Kurdish opposition groups announced a coalition.

Since then, Hengaw has documented a sharp rise in mobile checkpoints, vehicle searches, and violence against civilians.

Using a VPN to bypass internet restrictions costs the equivalent of about $25. To communicate with relatives abroad, families pay up to the equivalent of $50, an amount most cannot afford, she said. People also pay hefty rates to use smuggled Starlink connections.

To prevent Iranians from using the Iraqi network to make calls, Iran targeted cell towers operated by Iraqi telecommunication companies Asiacell and Korek near the border and then ordered security forces to shoot anyone approaching the area, Hassanpour said.

Authorities have also arrested anyone caught with a VPN app on their phone, accusing them of spying for Israel or the US, she added. —PTI

Palestinians guilty of killing Israelis may get death penalty

JERUSALEM, 30 MARCH

Israel's parliament is set to vote on a bill to make the death penalty the default punishment for West Bank Palestinians convicted of murdering Israelis.

The parliament began debate on Monday. The bill's passage would mark the culmination of a years long push by Israel's Far-Right— and victory for Israel's Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben-Gvir.

The legislation calls for the death penalty to go into effect within 30 days, though rights groups are expected to petition Israel's Supreme Court against it.

"With God's help, we will fully implement this law and kill our enemies," he said after the bill received approval to be brought to a final vote. He said it was "the most important law" to be approved by parliament in recent years.

But opponents of the legislation call it racist, draconian and unlikely to deter attacks by Palestinian militants. They say that it establishes a hierarchy in Israeli court systems.

Notably, the bill appears to apply to military courts, which try West Bank Palestinians, who are not Israeli citizens. Israeli courts, which try Israeli citizens, including Palestinian citizens of Israel, can choose between life imprisonment or the death penalty. However, Israel seems to be passing legislations for the West Bank – which is not its sovereign. The bill will also not be applicable retroactively. —*PTI*

Paintings worth $10 million stolen from Italy museum

ROME, 30 MARCH

Thieves stole three valuable paintings by Renoir, Cézanne, and Matisse from a private museum near Parma, Italy. The heist occurred overnight on 22-23 March when burglars forced open the museum's entrance. The stolen artworks are "Fish" by Auguste Renoir, "Still Life with Cherries" by Paul Cézanne, and "Odalisque on the Terrace" by Henri Matisse. The Magnani Rocca Foundation, established in 1977, houses works by Dürer, Rubens, Van Dyck, Goya, and Monet, and hosts the collection of art historian Luigi Magnani. The museum suspects a organised gang was responsible, as the theft was reportedly completed in less than three minutes. The theft follows recent high-profile European museum heists, including the Louvre. —*PTI*

Rains kill 9 in Pak, toll rises to 28 in Afghanistan

PESHAWAR, 30 MARCH

Nine people, including eight children, have died and 47 injured in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to heavy rain since 25 March, most from roof and wall collapses, said Provincial Disaster Management Authority. At least six houses are partially destroyed, with rescue efforts ongoing. Authorities urge caution and relief efforts are underway in districts like Bannu and North Waziristan. Meanwhile, Afghanistan reports a rise in weather-related fatalities, with 28 deaths and 49 injured from recent storms, floods, and landslides. Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority said 130 homes were destroyed, 436 damaged, and 1,130 families affected. Experts warn that such extreme weather, worsened by climate change and poor infrastructure, continues to devastate remote areas. —*PTI*

Maybe we will take Kharg Island for the oil: Trump

Allies tell Kyiv to curb strikes on Russian oil

DUBAI, 30 MARCH

Maybe the US will take Kharg Island next, US President Donald Trump said on Monday, giving a clear indication that he was eyeing Iran's oil infrastructure as he claimed he achieved regime change in the Islamic Republic.

The US has ramped up its military presence in the region, triggering fears that it was preparing for a ground invasion.

The US has targeted military positions on Kharg once. Iran threatened to launch its own ground invasion of Gulf Arab countries and mine the Persian Gulf if US troops set foot on its territory.

Iran has also said it has beefed its military presence on the island, through which nearly all of its oil passes.

An occupation of the island would put troops in a stationary position just 33 km off Iran's coast, well within range of Tehran's arsenal of drones and missiles.

Trump claimed he has achieved "regime change" in Iran.

"We have a group, it's really a new regime. It's the new group of people, people that we've never dealt with before, that are acting very reasonably. It is truly regime change," he said aboard his Air Force One.

Notably, Mojtaba Khamenei took over as the country's Supreme Leader after US-Israeli strikes killed his father Ali Khamenei. US and Israeli officials have justified the strikes on Iran as necessary for regime change.

Meanwhile, amid the de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Kyiv would curb its strikes on Russian oil and energy facilities to help stabilise the global prices.

"After the global energy crisis began, we received signals from partners requesting that we reduce our responses targeting Russia's oil and energy sector,"Zelenskyy said.

The US has already waived sanctions on Russian oil, much to the anger of Zelenskyy, who says that Moscow's oil export fuel its war machine. —*Agencies*

CAN'T TRUST US: IRAN REJECTS PAK'S PEACE BID

ISLAMABAD/CAIRO/ TEHRAN, 30 MARCH

Iran dismissed claims of direct talks with the US after Pakistan hosted a high-level meeting with the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt aimed at ending the war, stating that it did not participate.

After the meeting on Sunday, Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said that direct talks between Iran and the US were likely in the "coming days", a claim that resonated in Washington.

However, "it is not clear how much, even inside the US, the country's claims about diplomacy and negotiations are seriously taken into account," said spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry Esmaeil Baghaei said at a weekly press conference on Monday.

"Reactions also show that the extent of global trust in the US claims in the field of diplomacy is very limited."

He said that the US' 15-point plan made "very excessive, unrealistic and irrational" demands and noted that Iran did not participate in the talks in Islamabad.

Meanwhile, Dar will visit China to discus the war "as well as bilateral and global issues of mutual interest."

The Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia Egypt and Turkey have departed Pakistan, ending the two-day summit a day early.

SISSI BRINGS OUT THE CHARM

Meanwhile, Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi tried to woo Trump into ending the war.

"No one can end the war except you", he said. "You are one of the people who love peace" —*Agencies*

Iranian residents evacuate from a house after Israeli-US airstrikes on Monday —*IRIB*

Iran strikes oil facility in Israel

DUBAI, 30 MARCH

A fire broke out at an oil refinery in Israel's northern city of Haifa, one of only two in the country, either from a missile strike or from debris falling from an interception. The blaze was quickly extinguished, authorities said.

Sirens sounded at dawn near Israel's main nuclear research centre, a part of the country that has been targeted repeatedly in recent days.

This came as a petrochemical facility was struck in Iran's northern region. Iran said no hazardous materials had been released. The company takes oil or natural gas and processes them into chemical products used to make everyday materials like plastics and chemicals.

Meanwhile, Iran vowed to retaliatory attacks targeting the residences of US and Israeli commanders and political officials as it said Israeli was targeting civilian infrastructure across Tehran. Iran kept up the pressure on its Gulf Arab neighbours. Saudi Arabia intercepted five missiles targeting its oil-rich Eastern province; a fireball erupted over Dubai, United Arab Emirates, as a missile was intercepted; and in Kuwait.

Meanwhile, the Mohammed Alaa Air Base was hit by 122 mm Grad rockets launched from the outskirts of the capital, the Iraqi Defence Ministry said on Monday. The attack destroyed an Antonov-132 belonging to the Iraqi air force, the statement said. No casualties are reported.

MORE MEDICS KILLED IN LEBANON

In southern Lebanon, which Israel has invaded as it battles the Iran-backed Hezbollah, an Indonesian UN peacekeeper was killed and three others were wounded by an exploding projectile.

An Israeli airstrike on a Beirut suburb killed one person and wounded 17, including four children, said Lebanon's Health Ministry. —*Agencies*

Iranian missiles sparked a fire at an oil refinery in the Israel port city of Haifa, on Monday —*SCREENGRAB*

A portrait of Iran's late supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei seen as smoke rises from an Israeli airstrike in Dahiyeh, Beirut on Monday —*PTI*

Israel to expand 'buffer zone' in Lebanon: Bibi

TEL AVIV, 30 MARCH

Israel will widen its security buffer zone in southern Lebanon, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday.

He said he has given the orders to "further expand the existing security zone to definitively thwart the [Hezbollah] invasion threat and to push anti-tank missile fire away from our border."

He cited three buffer zones as examples. The Yellow Line in Gaza that Israel has been accused of moving, the Syria buffer zone, which is when Israel annexed territory beyond the Goland Heights and the Lebanon buffer zone.

"We have also changed our security concept. We initiate, we attack," he said. "Instead of them surprising us, we are surprising them… we are deep within their territory."

Multiple Israeli officials have called for annexing parts of southern Lebanon.

GREATER NORTH AMERICA?

Meanwhile, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said that Washington's geopolitical framework was called "Greater North America", and said that "every sovereign nation and territory north of the equator" is not part of the Global South, but part of the US security perimeter.

This runs from "Greenland to the Gulf of America (Mexico) from Alaska to Guyana". —*Agencies*

Iran confirms death of navy chief

DUBAI, 30 MARCH

Iran on Monday confirmed the death of Revolutionary Guard navy chief Alireza Tangsiri. Israel claimed responsibility for Tansgiri and the Strait of Hormuz closure on Thursday.

A statement from the Guard on Monday said Tangsiri "joined the ranks of Allah due to the severity of his injuries."

It praised his efforts, particularly in helping Iran maintain a chokehold on the Strait. "Every fighter is a Tangsiri, and we will see what surprises they will bring in the days and months ahead," the statement added. —*PTI*

Israel Parliament lets Bibi avoid early elections

TEL AVIV, 30 MARCH

Israel's parliament on Monday passed its annual budget, ensuring that Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu**'s government can complete its term until the fall. Israel needed to pass a budget before 1 April in order to avoid triggering early elections.

Netanyahu's government is in the final months of its term and must hold elections by the end of October.

The budget passed 62-55, with sirens warning of Iranian missiles toward Jerusalem interrupting discussions three times, forcing the session to be held in the auditorium, closer to a bomb shelter.

The USD 270 billion budget, Israel's largest ever, included a 20 per cent increase for the Ministry of Defence.

Israel's opposition, however, slammed the budget with former prime minister Naftali Bennett, who is expected to challenge Netanyahu in the upcoming elections. —*PTI*

Iran accuses Trump of market manipulation

TEHRAN, 30 MARCH

Iran's Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf accused the US of manipulating the market with the war.

Ghalibaf described pre-market cues from Washington as a "setup for profit-taking" and a "reverse indicator." He said that "If they pump it, short it. If they dump it, go long". He also appeared to reference Trump's posts on Truth Social.

His comments come amid widespread claims of market manipulation and insider trading by the government.

In the months leading up to Iran war, some $529 million tied to the timing of the strikes was traded on Polymarket

Similarly, Trump's frequent posts on Truth Social about Iran and oil have caused the markets to fluctuate. One person allegedly made nearly a billion dollars on the platform hours before Trump posted he was pausing strikes on Iran's energy infrastructure.

US Energy Secretary Chris Wight posted on X that the US Navy escorted a tanker through the Strait of Hormuz, causing oil futures to drop, before deleting the post.

Democrat lawmakers have also been accused of insider trading, with people buying millions of dollars of defence stocks before the strikes were launched. —*Agencies*

Spain closes airspace to US war aircrafts

Spain closed its airspace to US planes involved in the Iran war. Spain had said the US could not use jointly operated military bases in the country, triggering Trump.

Egypt to sleep early amid oil crisis

Commercial spaces, except tourist areas, in Egypt will shut at 9pm daily for a month, as Egypt deals with rising oil costs. Threatening Cairo's identity as a city that never sleeps.

'Latin Patriarch can enter Holy Sepulchre'

Netanyahu said Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa was granted full access to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre after police blocked entry ahead of Palm Sunday.

F-16s block plane in Don's airspace

A security alert at Florida's International Airport on Sunday prompted the launch of F-16 jets which deployed flares after a civilian plane violated flight restrictions near US President Donald Trump's Air Force One, New York Post reported.

Iran water plant bombed: IAEA

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said on Sunday that Iran's Khondab Heavy Water Plant is not operational following Israeli strikes. While the plant had no declared nuclear assets, such sites can be used for uranium enrichment.

DESPITE BLOCKADE

US lets Russian oil tanker reach Cuba

ABOARD AIRFORCE ONE, 30 MARCH

The US has allowed the Russian Anatoly Kolodkin to go to Cuba —*x*

US President Donald Trump on Sunday night said he has "no problem" with a Russian oil tanker delivering to Cuba, which has been brought to its knees by a US oil blockade.

Trump, in his gaggle with the Press on Air Force One en route to Joint Base Andrews, said that it doesn't bother him if countries are sending aid to Cuba, pointing out that his administration will be extending a helping hand to those Cuban-Americans who were thrown out of Cuba under the regime of Fidel Castro who headed the Carribean nation from 1959 to 2008.

"Yeah, Cuba's going to be next... It's a failing country… We have a tanker out there. We don't mind having somebody get a boatload because they need… they have to survive," Trump said. "I have no problem whether it's Russia or not."

On Monday, Russia's Transport Ministry said the oil tanker Anatoly Kolodkin arrived at the Cuban port of Matanzas carrying "humanitarian supplies" of about 730,000 barrels of oil.

The vessel is sanctioned by the United States, the European Union and the United Kingdom following the war in Ukraine.

Island-wide blackouts have roiled Cubans, and lack of gasoline and basic resources compounded by US sanctions and being cut off from ally Venezuela has crippled hospital and have slashed public transport. —*Agencies*

Afghanistan accuses Pak of killing civilians near border

KABUL, 30 MARCH

Injured child in Afghanistan—*UNAMA*

Afghanistan's government has accused Pakistan's military of shelling the outskirts of an eastern Afghan city on Sunday, resulting in one death and over a dozen injuries. The fighting, which began in late February, is the most intense between in decades. Kabul claims Pakistan is providing safe haven to militants, especially the Pakistani Taliban, a charge Islamabad denies.

Afghan deputy government spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat said "mortars and other heavy weaponry" were used to attack rural areas and homes near Asadabad in Kunar Province.

Early figures suggest one death and 16 injured, mostly women and children. There has been no immediate response from Pakistan.

The conflict has seen cross-border clashes and airstrikes inside Afghanistan, including a claim earlier this month that a Pakistani strike hit a Kabul hospital, killing over 400, which Pakistan denies. Fighting has raised fears over militant resurgence, and recent ceasefire attempts have failed, with more clashes earlier this week after a brief truce. —*PTI*

– PTI

Voltas gets Rs 23.52 cr notice on import labelling

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Customs authority has slapped a demand notice of Rs 23.52 crore, including duty and penalty, on air-condition maker Voltas over alleged mis-classification of certain imported goods, a regulatory filing said on Monday. The company is analysing the order and will take appropriate action including filing of an appeal before the CESTAT. The order stated, there was "mis-classification of certain imported goods pertaining to the period from 14th June, 2019 to 21st July, 2022". It is "demanding payment of differential customs duty of Rs 10.76 crore along with applicable interest, and a penalty of Rs 12.76 crore under the relevant provisions of the Customs Act, 1962," the company said ruling out any impact on its activities.—*PTI*

Black Box raises Rs 386 crore via warrant conversion

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Digital infrastructure solutions provider Black Box, an Essar Group firm, on Monday said it has raised Rs 386.36 crore through the conversion of warrants into equity shares, with promoters contributing Rs 200 crore to the total infusion. "Black Box Limited... today announced the successful receipt of Rs 386.36 crore pursuant to the conversion of warrants issued on September 27, 2024...All warrant holders have exercised their rights in full, with no forfeiture or withdrawal.Black Box CEO Sanjeev Verma said the capital infusion strengthens the company's balance sheet and provides flexibility to accelerate its growth agenda, scale digital infrastructure capabilities, and expand its market presence. The company's promoter shareholding increased to 69.99 per cent.—*PTI*

Pioneer Fil-Med files for Rs 500 crore IPO

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Railway components maker Pioneer Fil-Med Ltd has filed draft papers with the markets regulator Sebi to raise Rs 500 crore through an initial public offering (IPO). The proposed issue comprises a fresh issue of equity shares aggregating Rs 250 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of shares worth Rs 250 crore by existing shareholders, according to the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) filed on Sunday. The OFS includes stake sales by promoter Pioneer Facor IT Infradevelopers and promoter group entity Aztech India, each proposing to offload shares worth up to Rs 125 crore. The company proposes to utilise the proceeds from the fresh issue towards part financing the cost of establishing a gear box manufacturing facility at Salarpur, Rajasthan.—*PTI*

Rupee breaches 95-mark against USD for 1st time

Rupee on course to log its steepest drop since 2011-12

MUMBAI, 30 MARCH

The rupee hit a historic low of 95.22 in intra-day trade on Monday, with rising oil prices, ongoing geopoliti-cal tensions, and a strong dollar environment .

The unit is on course to log its steepest fiscal year drop since 2011-12.

The RBI's move to tighten limits on banks' foreign exchange positions offered only brief support to the rupee.

The RBI directed banks to cap their net open rupee positions in the foreign exchange market at USD 100 million by the end of each business day till 10 April to reduce speculative positions and limiting volatility in the currency market.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 93.62 and then gained further ground to 93.57 against the US dollar, registering a gain of 128 paise from its previous close.

The RBI injected Ts 84,582 crore of transient liquidity into the banking syste through two variable rate repo auctions on Monday —*AI*

However, it failed to sustain the momentum and fell to an all-time intra-day low of 95.22, falling 0.2 per cent from its previous close. against the American currency.

A failing rupee can significantly impact the cost of living of the people, with inflation rising, commodities and services becoming costlier across all sectors.

Forex traders said the USD/INR pair is facing pressure from the elevated dollar index and crude oil prices. Safe-haven demand is keeping the dollar index firm above the 100 mark, limiting any meaningful recovery in the rupee.

"The bottom line is that the RBI's cap does not change the underlying dynamics that fuelled pressure on the currency," Barclays analysts said.

The RBI also injected Rs 84,582 crore of transient liquidity into the banking system through two variable rate repo (VRR) auctions.

The central bank injected Rs 50,001 crore through first three-day VRR auction early in the day at cut-off rate of 5.34 per cent and weighted average rate of 5.44 per cent. The RBI injected another Rs 34,581 crore at 5.26 per cent cut-off and 5.30 per cent weighted average rate at an auction later during the day. —*PTI*

No agreement on e-commerce duty moratorium at WTO meet

YAOUNDE, 30 MARCH

The WTO's fourteenth Ministerial Conference (MC14) ended on Monday with no consensus on extending the moratorium on customs duties on electronic commerce, such as digital downloads and streaming.

Initiated in 1998, the moratorium has been extended biennially, but its expiry could lead to tariffs on e-commerce. Talks between Brazil and the US deadlocked, with some members opposing an extension or favouring two years; the US advocated for a five-year extension.

The current moratoriums, due to expire on 31 March, will now be discussed further in Geneva. Cameroon's Trade Minister Luc Magloire Mbarga Atangana said the ministers aimed to conclude as many issues as possible but "ran out of time" on key topics like WTO reform and electronic commerce.

WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala welcomed progress on fisheries subsidies and other issues, urging members to finalise agreements in Geneva.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal addresses a meeting on the sidelines of the ministerial conference of WTO in Yaounde —*PTI*

Nearly 2,000 officials, including over 90 ministers, attended, with this being only the second WTO Ministerial held in Africa.

The WTO defines e-commerce as the production, distribution, marketing, sale, or delivery of goods and services electronically. Since 1998, members agreed not to impose customs duties on electronic transmissions, but developing nations opposed extending this amid rising imports of digital content.

The US, EU, and Japan supported a long-term extension, while India and others argued it would limit policy options and cause revenue losses, estimated at USD 10 billion annually. The expiry also ends protections under WTO's TRIPS non-violation clause. —*PTI*

Industrial output growth rises 5.2%

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

India's industrial production grew 5.2 per cent in February, mainly due to an improvement in manufacturing output, according to official data released on Monday.

The factory output, measured in terms of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), expand-ed by 2.7 per cent in February 2025.

The National Statistics Office (NSO) revised the industrial production growth for January 2026 to 5.1 per cent from the provisional estimate of 4.8 per cent.

The manufacturing sector's output growth accelerated to 6 per cent in February 2026 compared to 2.8 per cent in the year-ago month.

Mining production growth slightly improved to 3.1 per cent, while power generation growth stood at 2.3 per cent.

During the April-February period of FY26, the country's industrial production growth re-mained flat year-on-year at 4.1 per cent.

Within the manufacturing sector, 14 out of 23 industry groups have recorded a positive growth in February— *PTI*

Stock markets slump 2%, end FY26 with losses

MUMBAI, 30 MARCH

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended the last trading session of the 2025-26 fiscal year sharply lower on Monday as West Asia crisis and surging crude oil prices kept investors' sentiment fragile.

Weak trends in Asian markets and unabated foreign fund outflows also added to the bearish trend in domestic equities.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 1,635.67 points or 2.22 per cent to settle at 71,947.55. During the day, it plunged 1,809.09 points or 2.45 per cent to 71,774.13.

A total of 3,563 stocks declined, while 876 advanced and 154 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty slumped 488.20 points or 2.14 per cent to end at 22,331.40.

"Weak global cues, including declines across Asian and US markets, coupled with continued foreign institutional outflows and a weakening rupee, further weighed on sentiment," Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance, State Bank of India, InterGlobe Aviation, Bajaj Finserv, Axis Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the biggest laggards. However, Tech Mahindra and Power Grid were the gainers.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 2.18 per cent to USD 115.1 per barrel.

In the 2025-26 financial year, the BSE benchmark plunged 5,467.37 points, or 7 per cent, and the Nifty dropped 1,187.95 points, or 5 per cent.

The BSE MidCap Select index lost 3.13 per cent, and the SmallCap Select index declined 2.14 per cent. Sectorally, all indices ended in red, with auto, consumer durables, capital goods and private and PSU banks falling between 2–4 per cent. —*PTI*

COAL INDIA ARM LISTS AT 10% DISCOUNT

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Shares of Central Mine Planning and Design Institute Ltd, an arm of state-owned Coal India, on Monday ended with a discount of over 10 per cent against the issue price of Rs 172.

The stock started trading at Rs 162.80, down 5.34 per cent from the issue price on the BSE. During the day, it plunged 11.45 per cent to Rs 152.30. Shares of the firm later ended at Rs 154.05, down 10.43 per cent.

At the NSE, the stock listed at Rs 160, registering a discount of 6.97 per cent. It finally ended at Rs 154.06, a decline of 10.43 per cent. The company's market valuation stood at Rs 10,999.17 crore.

The initial public offering of Central Mine Planning & Design Institute Ltd got fully subscribed on 23 March.

The Rs 1,842-crore IPO had a price band of Rs 163-172 per share.

The issue was entirely an offer for sale of 10.71 crore shares, worth Rs 1,842.12 crore at the upper end, by Coal India. —*PTI*

India to offer 21 oil, gas blocks in OALP-XI bid

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

India is set to offer 21 blocks for oil and natural gas exploration in the upcoming Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP-XI) bidding round, according to the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH).

The blocks include 12 onshore, four shallow water, one deepsea, and four ultra-deep sea areas, covering approximately 80,235 square kilometres. "Bid submission start and closing dates will be announced soon," DGH stated.

The 11th round of OALP was launched in February 2025 during India Energy Week, with the deadline initially set for July 2025, then extended multiple times, most recently to 29 May.

This round features the largest acreage offering in India's history, covering about 191,986 sq km across 13 sedimentary basins. Bidders for Category-I sedimentary basins, with proven commercial production, will be awarded based on highest revenue share and work programme.

For Category-II and III blocks, the highest work programme, including seismic and drilling, will decide awards. The policy allows explorers to identify areas freely, with reduced royalty rates, no oil cess, and marketing freedom. In the previous round, 28 blocks of over 136,000sqkm were offered, attracting major players like ONGC, Oil India, etc. —*PTI*

No design, no subsidy: Govt draws red line for electronics firms

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

The government may halt disbursement under the Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS) if beneficiaries do not invest in product design technology and meet Six Sigma standards, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced.

After approving 29 proposals worth Rs 7,104 crore, he warned that those not investing in product design will be weeded out.

Vaishnaw criticised industry body ICEA and its member firms for not adhering to the integrated approach set by Meity to foster high-quality and self-reliant electronics manufacturing. The minister has given a 15-day deadline for the industry to update the government on measures related to product design, Six Sigma standards, talent development, and local sourcing.

Indian Cellular Association's president Pankaj Mohindroo, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and MeitY secretary S Krishnan in New Delhi —*PTI*

Govt clears 29 proposals worth Rs 7,104 cr

The government has approved 29 applications under the electronics component manufacturing scheme entailing cumulative investment of Rs 7,104 crore.

The Ministry of Electronics and IT (Meity) Secretary, S Krishnan, said the fresh investment proposal will create as many as 14,246 new jobs in the segment. The new applications will lead to the production of electronics components worth Rs 84,515 crore. —*PTI*

'No adverse impact of Iran war on hi-tech industry'

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

The government is in dialogue with hi-tech industry associations on the West Asia conflict and its impact on the ecosystem, and industry bodies have not reported any adverse impact on their operations, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Monday.

The Electronics and IT Minister's comments came amid reports that the helium crunch has started impacting global tech supply chains.

"We have asked every industry association here, and each one has said that so far there is no impact. This includess semiconductors, mobile, electronics components, and hardware space...It is an evolving situation. So, we will continue interacting with the industry," Vaishnaw said.

The industry believes that the West Asia crisis will not be prolonged, he said. —*PTI*

EV transition must be inclusive, sustainable: Govt

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

India's electric mobility transition must be inclusive and economically sustainable with a focus on affordability and scalability across both urban as well as rural markets, **Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy** said on Monday.

Speaking at the launch of the industry-led platform, Light Electric-Vehicle Acceleration Forum (LEAF), the Minister for Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises, said the focus must move beyond just adding more charging points.

Light electric vehicles will remain central to this as they serve as the primary mode of transport for millions of Indians, he said.

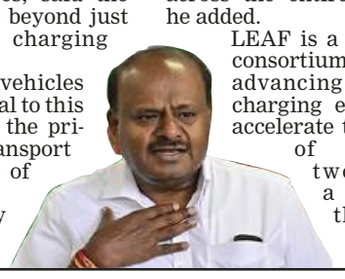
Kumaraswamy said India has a real opportunity to lead, not just domestically but globally.

The minister reiterated that ultimately the success of this transition will depend on strong partnerships between the government and the industry.

He assured that the government will continue to provide policy support, enable innovation and strengthen manufacturing ecosystems.

LEAF can serve as a model on how collaboration can drive meaningful change across the entire ecosystem, he added.

LEAF is a industry-led consortium focused on advancing the EV charging ecosystem to accelerate the adoption of electric two-wheelers and three-wheelers. —*PTI*



CALLS IT NEW THREAT

Platforms doubled-tripled deepfake takedowns: Vaishnaw

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Monday highlighted rising concerns over AI-generated deepfakes, and noted that social media platforms, too, have scaled up efforts on deepfake takedowns. The minister termed deepfakes as a new menace and a threat to society.

"A lot of content has started coming in the nature of deepfakes....social media platforms themselves have significantly ramped up their efforts at removing the deepfakes," the Information and Broadcasting Minister said.

The platforms themselves have almost doubled or tripled their own takedowns of deepfake content, he added.

"It's a new menace, new threat, which is coming for the society," he said, adding that countering it effectively is very important for society, for every individual, and institution.

Vaishnaw also said that a Centre of Excellence should be established at Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalay in Gujarat's Vadodara for development of talent in the field of manufacturing technology.

The central university under the Railway Ministry, follows a demand-driven curriculum to meet the industry needs of the transportation sector.

During the MoU signing event between GSV and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to revamp training for aircraft maintenance engineering, Vaishnaw said manufacturing technology training for sectors such as aviation, railways, marine and electronics needed a high level of precision and effort.

He sought support from Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu.

He asked officials to follow the precision training standards of developed countries such as Germany, the US, and Japan to design the course to have a high benchmark.—*PTI*

Call money rates hit 7% amid liquidity demand

MUMBAI, 30 MARCH

Call money rates on Monday touched the 7 per cent mark as banks stepped up borrowing to meet heightened liquidity requirements ahead of the fiscal year-end.

Market participants said the demand for short-term funds has risen sharply due to balance sheet adjustments, and regulatory requirements, leading to tighter liquidity conditions in the banking system.

The call money rate is the interest rate charged on these overnight funds.

According to the Clearing Corporation of India, rates in the call money market which is used by lenders and other institutions for short term liquidity requirements, opened at 6.85 per cent, and then touched at 7 per cent.

Similarly, the Tri-party repo rate opened at 5.60 per cent, and then touched a high of 6.99 per cent.

Usually, during the financial year end, demand for funds rises from banks despite the liquidity in the banking system remain in surplus mode.

Liquidity in the banking system was in surplus of around Rs 1.14 lakh crore as on 27 March. The RBI today injected Rs 50,001 crore transient liquidity to the banking system through three-day variable rate repo auction. —*PTI*

— PTI

NY marathon winner banned 5 years for doping

MONACO, 30 MARCH

The 2021 New York Marathon winner, Albert Korir of Kenya, was banned for five years after he admitted doping, track and field investigators said Monday. Korir tested positive for the blood-boosting substance CERA, a modern version of EPO, in three different samples taken in Kenya last October while he was training to run in New York. The Athletics Integrity Unit said in its verdict that all his results since October will be disqualified, including his third-place finish in New York last November. The 32-year-old Korir's ban expires in January 2031. The ban was shortened by one year because he admitted his doping without requesting a hearing, the verdict said. Korir will be allowed to keep his 2021 New York title. He also finished runner-up in 2019 and 2023, and third in 2024. —PTI

Mihika, Arjun in pickleball squad for US Open

MUMBAI, 30 MARCH

Mihika Yadav and Arjun Singh are among those selected to represent India in the US Open pickleball tournament to be held in Naples, Florida, from 9-18 April. The other members of the squad include Purvansh Patel (open), Aditya Singh (open), Naga Moksha (girls U-18), Jeet Sood (U-16) and Yuvraj Singh (U-16). It also features Panth Thakkar and Atharva Sheth in the sub-junior category, and Suryaveer Singh Bhullar (men's 50-plus doubles and mixed doubles). The team will be coached by Dhiren Patel, who will be competing in the 40-plus men's pro singles. India will get a direct entry into the tournament due to partnership between IPA and the US Open. —PTI

Gill, Iyer eye redemption in GT-PBKS opener

Scrutiny remains over Gill's strike rate, which has hovered at around 138

MULLANPUR, 30 MARCH

Overlooked India T20I batters Shubman Gill and Shreyas Iyer will look to make a statement as they lead Gujarat Titans and Punjab Kings respectively in their Indian Premier League opener in Mullanpur on Tuesday.

India's Test and ODI captain Gill, who was named T20I vice-captain but later left out of the World Cup squad, enters a crucial phase in his T20 career. Since 2023, only Virat Kohli has scored more IPL runs than him. However, scrutiny remains over his strike rate, which has hovered around 138, though he improved to over 155 last season. With Matthew Hayden joining the coaching staff, Gill's intent and power-hitting will be closely watched. Since Hardik Pandya's exit, he has grown into leadership, with GT built firmly around him.

Former champions GT remain a settled unit, retaining 20 players. The opening pair of Gill and Sai Sudharsan, last season's top scorer with 759 runs, is their biggest strength. Sudharsan returns from a rib fracture but showed strong domestic form. Wicketkeeper-batter Kumar Kushagra provides depth after an impressive Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy campaign.

For PBKS, much hinges on Iyer, who has led three IPL teams to finals. Despite scoring 604 runs at a strike rate above 175 last season, he remains out of favour with selectors led by Ajit Agarkar.

Punjab's strength lies in their Indian core. Openers Prabhsimran Singh and Priyansh Arya combined for 1,024 runs last season, though recent form has dipped. The middle order, featuring Nehal Wadhera, Shashank Singh and Suryansh Shedge, will be tested against GT's spin.

Australia's Connolly is set to slot in at No. 3 as a specialist batter, replacing Josh Inglis.

The match is scheduled to start at 7.30pm. — PTI

CA says KKR 'fully aware' of Cameron Green's injury

SYDNEY, 30 MARCH

Cricket Australia said the Kolkata Knight Riders' management is "fully aware" of Cameron Green's injury after the team's captain Ajinkya Rahane created a flutter by stating that only the all-rounder's home board knew why he could not bowl in their IPL opener against Mumbai Indians.

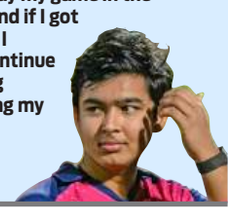
Rahane deflected queries on Green's absence in Mumbai on Sunday saying, "Ask Cricket Australia," triggering a mild controversy. "Cameron has a lower back injury which is being managed but he has to abstain from bowling for some time," a CA spokesperson said.

"Cameron is currently rebuilding his bowling in India with a view to return in around 10-12 days. KKR has been communicated this," he said. Green did not bowl for nearly 12 months, from September 2024 to October 2025, after undergoing surgery for fracture on his back and even after that, his bowling have been minimal. Green's last bowling was in the T20 World Cup against Oman on 20 February 2026 at Pallekele, where he bowled two overs.

Green just bowled 19 deliveries during the showpiece and took one wicket (against Zimbabwe).

KKR had gone all out at the IPL mini auction to secure the Australian for Rs 25.20 crore, making him the costliest overseas buy. — PTI

> When I was picked, my only goal was to give the team a good start. I wanted to play my game in the Powerplay, and if I got a good start, I wanted to continue and play long without giving my wicket away
>
> -Vaibhav Sooryavanshi



Caruana, Praggs share lead after Round 1

PAPHOS, 30 MARCH

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa kicked off his campaign at the prestigious Candidates Tournament by breaking through the defences of Dutchman Anish Giri to secure a full point. He now shares the lead with American GM Fabiano Caruana and Uzbekistan's Javokhir Sindarov here.

In an eventful first round, World Cup champion Sindarov showcased his excellent tactical skill to turn the tables on Russia's Andrey Esipenko, while pre-event favourite Caruana stunned fellow American Hikaru Nakamura.

Praggnanandhaa had been struggling in recent months leading up to the Candidates but has now bounced back in style, and Giri, one of the most consistent and solid players on the circuit, was simply no match for him on Saturday. Giri, running low on time, blundered in a lost rook-and-pawns endgame with a pawn less. The rest was easy for Praggnanandhaa.

Praggnanandhaa had been struggling in recent months leading up to the Candidates but has now bounced back in style —PTI

The other game of the eight-player double round-robin tournament between Germany's Matthias Bluebaum and China's Wei Yi ended in a stalemate with both players sharing a point.

In the women's section being held simultaneously, Indian Grandmaster and Women's World Cup champion Divya Deshmukh drew with Ukraine's Anna Muzychuk, a last-minute replacement for Koneru Humpy, while R. Vaishali survived some anxious moments before sharing the point with Kazakhstan's Bibisara Assaubayeva. —PTI

POSITIVE NOTE

Preeti, Deepak give India good start at Asian Boxing

ULAANBAATAR, 30 MARCH

Asian Games bronze medallist Preeti Pawar and Deepak registered contrasting victories to begin India's campaign at the Asian Boxing Championships on a positive note here on Monday.

In the women's 54kg category, Preeti delivered a commanding performance to secure a 5-0 unanimous decision victory over Kazakhstan's Elina Bazarova, a former Asian U22 champion (2025). Preeti's clinical win marked a strong statement to open her campaign.

In the men's 70kg category, Deepak, a silver medallist at the Boxam Elite International 2026, and a bronze medallist at the Asian Youth Boxing Championships 2022, edged past Uzbekistan's Khavasbek Asadullaev with a 3-2 split decision win.

The Asian Boxing Championships 2026 features some of the best boxing talent from across the continent, with early-round matchups often proving as challenging as the later stages due to the depth of competition. — PTI

Zaman, Afridi & Raza deny ball-tampering

LAHORE, 30 MARCH

Pakistan's opening stalwart Fakhar Zaman has denied ball-tampering charges stemming from the Pakistan Super League match between Lahore Qalandars and Karachi Kings at the Gaddafi Stadium.

The 35-year-old was charged on Sunday night by match referee Roshan Mahanama with a Level 3 offence under Article 2.14 of the PSL Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel. Zaman was found to have violated Article 41.3 of the PSL playing conditions, which prohibits any action that alters the condition of the ball. Appearing before the former Sri Lankan cricketer, Zaman denied the charges against him.

Shaheen Shah Afridi, stalwart Fakhar Zaman —PTI

The charge relates to an incident just before the final over of the Karachi Kings' innings, when they needed 14 runs to win. Zaman was seen in discussion with Rauf and Lahore Qalandars captain Shaheen before the over.

Shortly thereafter, umpire Faisal Afridi requested the ball and, after inspecting it with his colleague, determined that its condition had been altered.

The umpires penalised Lahore Qalandars five runs for altering the condition of the ball and subsequently replaced it. This left Karachi Kings needing nine runs in the final over, which they successfully chased down. —PTI

Afridi, Raza accused of breaching hotel security rules

LAHORE, 30 MARCH

Pakistan Super League side Lahore Qalandars skipper Shaheen Shah Afridi and overseas player Sikandar Raza have found themselves at the centre of an embarrassing situation after being accused of breaching team security protocols at their hotel.

According to the police official, despite prior warnings and refusal, Shaheen and Sikandar were found hosting four guests in Raza's room on the eighth floor until 1:25 am.

The liaison officer of Lahore Qalandars, followed by team owner Sameen Rana, had sought permission to allow guests into Raza's room at around 10:35 pm. and again at 11:00 pm. on Saturday, but both requests were denied.

Despite the refusal, at around 11:05 pm., PCB and security personnel reported that Shaheen and Raza ignored protocols and escorted the four guests into Raza's room, despite objections from security staff. The guests remained there until 1:25 am. —PTI

Fitness set to be in focus at women's hockey camp

NEW DELHI, 30 MARCH

Focusing on combinations, fitness, and tactics, 31 core probables will assemble for the senior women's national hockey camp on April 1 to prepare for this year's World Cup. The camp will be conducted at the Sports Authority of India's National Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru. India is also set to compete in the Nations Cup in June, followed by the World Cup and Asian Games.

The defensive line-up includes seasoned players like Nikki Pradhan and Udita, alongside Ishika Chaudhary, Jyoti Singh, Lalthantluangi, Jyoti, and Shilpi Dabas, offering depth at the back.

The midfield included captain Salima Tete, Sushila Chanu Pukhrambam, Manisha Chauhan, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, and Neha, complemented by promising players such as Sakshi Rana, who was awarded the Hockey India Asunta Lakra Award for Upcoming Player of the Year, Sunelita Toppo, and Ishika.

The forward line has strong attacking options, like Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr. Award for Player of the Year (Women) winner Navneet, Deepika, Lalremsiami, Mumtaz Khan, Deepika Soreng, Rutaja Dadaso Pisal, Baljeet Kaur, Annu, Beauty Dungdung, Hina Bano,Sonam and Sangita Kumari (Rehab). —PTI

Sinner beats Lehecka to win Miami Open

MIAMI GARDENS, 30 MARCH

Jannik Sinner rolled to a 6-4, 6-4 victory over Jiri Lehecka to capture the Miami Open title and complete the "Sunshine Double" on Sunday, a day after Aryna Sabalenka accomplished the same feat in a win over Coco Gauff.

The last male player to complete the double — winning Indian Wells followed by Miami in the same season — was Roger Federer in 2017. Sinner is the first male to do so without dropping a set in either tournament.

"It's very, very special moment," Sinner said. "Coming here, performing in a good way after Indian Wells, means a lot to me. The second-seeded Sinner didn't let either of the two 90-minute rain delays slow him. He notched 10 aces in the final, and 70 in the tournament for the second-most of his career. He often had No. 21 Lehecka running from side to side with his precise, deep groundstrokes. —PTI

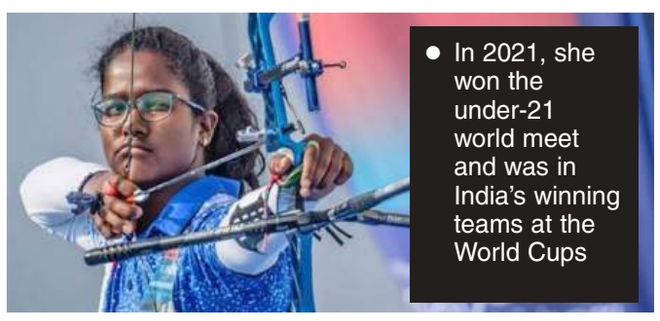
Komalika Bari eyes Asian Games comeback with sheer hard work

RAIPUR, 30 MARCH

Once seen as the next big thing in Indian archery after Olympian Deepika Kumari, 24-year-old Komalika Bari has slipped to a lowly 498 in the world rankings and has been out of the national team since 2024.

But she is not giving up. With a packed season ahead, culminating in the Asian Games in Japan later this year, she hopes to fight her way back and revive her dream of competing at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

"Currently in the Indian Top 16 and part of the national training camp, I am preparing rigorously for the Asian Games selection," Komalika told SAI Media at the Khelo India Tribal Games. "My focus is on competing as much as possible to gain experience while maintaining our intensive training schedule."



- In 2021, she won the under-21 world meet and was in India's winning teams at the World Cups

In 2021, she won the under-21 World Championship in Wroclaw and later went on to be part of India's gold medal-winning teams at the World Cups in Guatemala City and Paris in 2021. She also bagged a team bronze in Gwangju in 2022 under Kumari's coach, Poornima Mahato.

Competing at the inaugural Khelo India Tribal Games, Komalika also hopes to inspire youngsters of similar backgrounds.

"My focus is on the (2028) Olympics. Right now, my training is very intense. The main emphasis is on staying mentally strong, because it is important for my performance," Kumari said. —PTI

WORLD PARA ARCHERY MEET

Sheetal named 'Para Archer of the Year'

LAUSANNE, 30 MARCH

India's Sheetal Devi has been named World Archery's Para Archer of the Year 2025, adding to her achievements that include a historic world title. The 19-year-old from Jammu & Kashmir became the first female armless archer to win gold at the World Para Archery Championships, taking the women's compound individual crown in Gwangju last year.

Born without arms, Sheetal skilfully uses her feet, legs, and shoulder to draw the bow and shoot. She secured a complete set of medals at the World Championships, winning the women's team silver and mixed team bronze.

Beyond her World Championship gold, Sheetal also boasts of a Paris Paralympics bronze in the mixed team event, along with individual silvers from the 2022 Asian Para Games and the 2023 Asian Championships in Bangkok. "Nominated among the world's best and now named top para archer by @worldarchery—this feels deeply personal. Grateful for everything this journey has brought," Arjuna awardee Sheetal posted on X on Monday. "The 2025 World Archery Awards honour the season's most exceptional athletes and officials for their excellence, fair play and dedication to the sport," it added. The awards, launched in 2011, honour outstanding contributions to the sport.

This year, the awards were presented across eight categories, including 'Archer of the Year,' which went to Emircan Haney of Turkey; 'Young Archer of the Year,' awarded to Baptiste Addis of France; and 'Best Team of the Year,' claimed by Korea's recurve men's team. —PTI

Born without arms, Sheetal skilfully uses her feet, legs and shoulder to draw the bow and shoot —PTI